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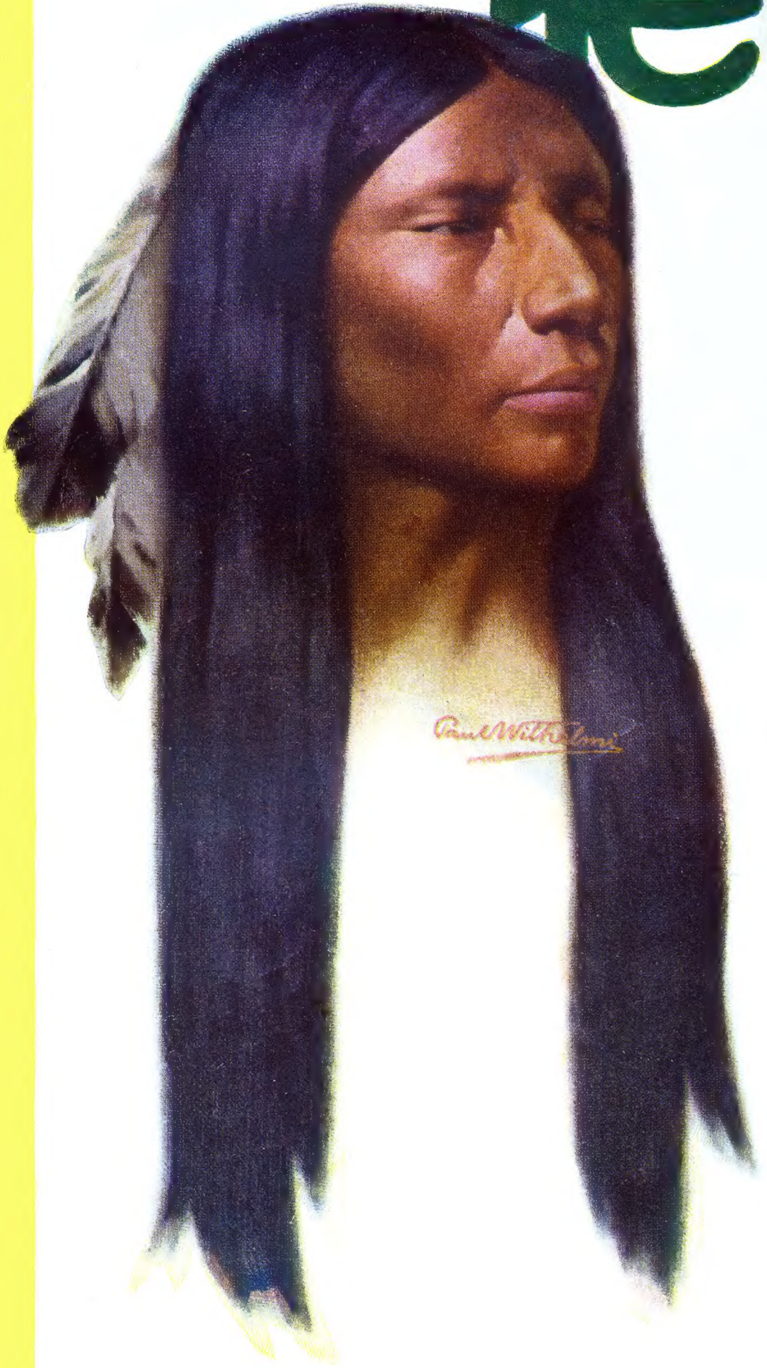

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CONTENTS *for* DECEMBER 1914

Cover Design . . . . ***Paul Wilhelmi***

The Stolen War-Secret ***A Book-Length Novel*** . . . . . . **Arthur B. Reeve** . 3

A story of **Craig Kennedy,** scientific detective. No other recommendation needed. Mr. Reeve's tales of his famous investigator have more than a national reputation. In this one **Craig Kennedy** deals with a huge plot to gain possession of a secret war-device that is vital to the safety of the United States.

Lancing the Whale: An Adventure of Dick Anthony of Arran
A Complete Novelette . **Talbot Mundy** . . 62

Dick Anthony here goes into action on a larger scale than ever before. Our readers never get enough of Talbot Mundy, and Talbot Mundy is at his best in these tales of **Dick Anthony,** Scots gentleman and adventurer of adventurers, a character who is already taking a place alongside **Captain Kettle, Brigadier Gerard, Don Q., Raffles,** and all others of the best and biggest.

Missing ***A Poem*** . . . . **A. Judson Hanna** . 96

Immediate Lee . . . . **Kenneth B. Clarke** . 97

Here a man squares accounts and squares them hard. He got his nickname "Immediate" from his method of using a gun.

Proof . . . . **Samuel Alexander White** 101

Alaska and the Yukon cast a spell of their own. This story is of a man who stood very close to death and found something of value that may figure in later stories.

A Man With Nine Lives ***A Two-Part Story I.*** . . . . . . **Richard Marsh** . . 106

A murder, a struggle for vast wealth; one man pitted against many unseen enemies; mysteries within mysteries—the kind of tale to make you sit up at night.

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from preceding page)

Come-On Charley Tries Out Wall Street . . . . **Thomas Addison** . 151

If ever a magazine character jumped to sudden popularity and fame it is **Come-On Charley.** Reported to have inherited $2,000,000, he becomes a magnet for all the "con" men. Does he hold his own? "Sure," says **Charley.**

Not Down on the Bill . . . . **J. U. Giesy** . . 163

Many things can happen under the "big-top" of a circus that do not appear on the program, especially when hate, love and daring are stirred to their depths.

"For Ways That Are Dark" . . . . **Norman Springer** . 171

A short story with a lot in it. Including some very interesting people who do some very interesting things.

The West ***A Poem*** . . . . **Mary Carolyn Davies** . 175

The Sinews of War ***A Two-Part Story II.*** . . . . **Arthur D. Howden Smith** 176

A story of the part played by an American in the Balkans—war, love, intrigue, adventure. Full of action.

The Camp-Fire **A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers** 219

The Trail Ahead 224

Headings . . . . *C. B. Falls*

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THE JANUARY NUMBER

WHEN the January *Adventure* comes out on December 3d you're going to get the first part (half the size of a full-sized book) of a four-part story of Africa that will make Rider Haggard look to his laurels. The title fits the story to a T. Have you Viking blood in your veins? Then you'll find in this tale of today things to make your pulse leap to a strange, thrilling time. But any kind of blood will do that for you when you read

"The Adventurers"

W. Townend is an old friend of *Adventure* readers. Many a tale of his you've read and enjoyed, but never a long one. In January will appear his first novelette, a tale of the West that will take you tighter and tighter in its grip as you go along. A big story called

"Oil at San Nicolas"

What else? The completion of "A Man With Nine Lives;" a tale of how **Dick Anthony** carried things home to Russia with a vengeance; **Come-On Charley's** weird performance at Christmas time, and—please note this—in the January number *Adventure* is going to set an entirely new fashion in baseball stories—a stunt we've never seen done and that you'll like. As for the other things in January, turn to the last page of this number in your hands.

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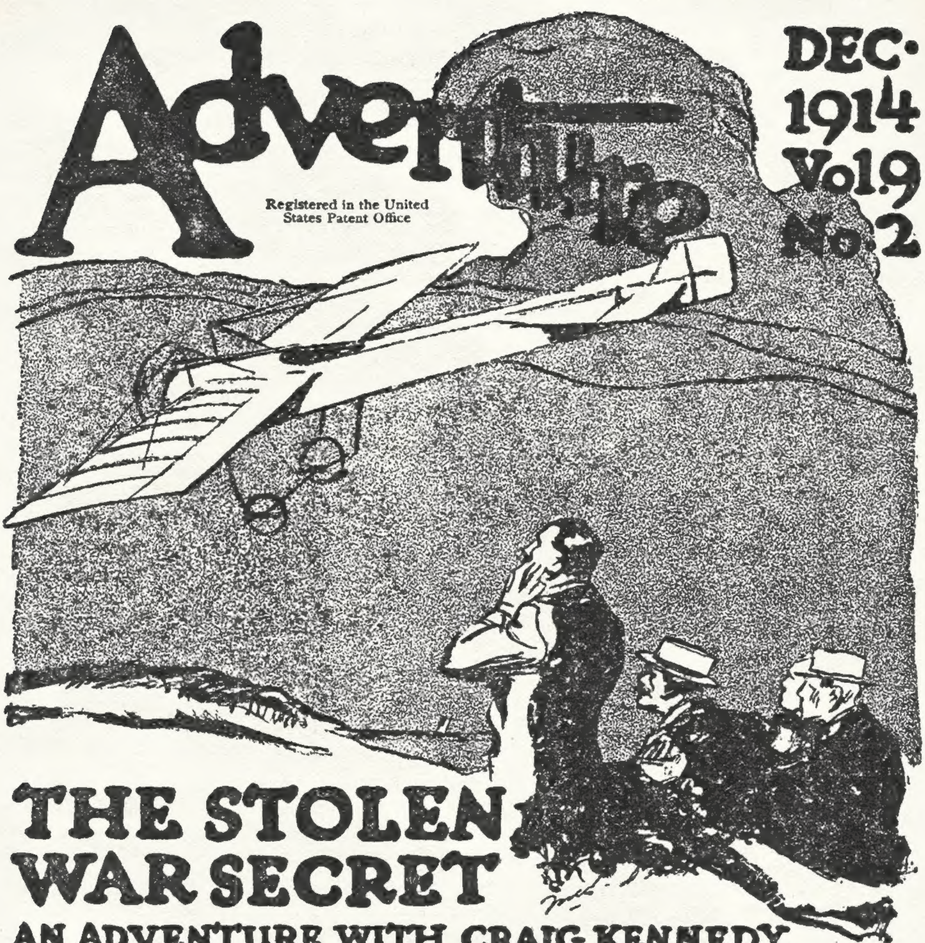

THE STOLEN WAR SECRET

AN ADVENTURE WITH CRAIG KENNEDY, SCIENTIFIC DETECTIVE

by ARTHUR B. REEVE

CHAPTER I

THE MYSTERY OF THE SPY

IT WAS during the dark days at the beginning of our recent unpleasantness with Mexico that Craig Kennedy and I dropped in one evening at the new Vanderveer Hotel to glance at the ticker to see how affairs were going.

We were bending over the tape, oblivious to everything else about us, when we felt a hand on each of our shoulders.

"We've just had a most remarkable tragedy right here in the hotel," a voice whispered. "Are you busy tonight, Kennedy?"

Craig and I turned simultaneously and found Michael McBride, the house-detective of the hotel, an old friend of ours some years before in the city detective-bureau.

McBride was evidently making a great effort to appear calm, but it was very apparent that something had completely upset him.

"How's that?" asked Kennedy shaking hands.

McBride gave a hasty glance about and edged us over into a quiet corner away from the ticker.

"Why," he replied in an undertone, "we've just discovered one of our guests—a Madame Valcour—in her room—dead!"

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"Dead?" repeated Kennedy in amazement.

"Yes—the most incomprehensible thing you can imagine. Come upstairs with me, before the coroner gets here," he urged. "I'd like you to see the case, Kennedy, before he musses things up."

We followed the house-detective to the tenth floor. As we left the elevator he nodded to the young woman floor-clerk who led the way down the thickly carpeted hall. She stopped at a door, and through the transom overhead we could see that the room was dimly lighted. She opened the door and we caught a glimpse of a sumptuously furnished suite.

On the snowy white bed, in all her cold, stony beauty, lay the beautiful Madame Valcour, fully dressed in the latest of Parisian creations, perfect from her hat which breathed of the Rue de la Paix to her dainty tango-slippers peeping from a loosely draped skirt which accentuated rather than concealed her exquisite form.

She was a striking woman, dark of hair and skin. In life she must have been sensuously attractive. But now her face was drawn and contorted with a ghastly look.

There she lay, alone, in an elegantly appointed room of an exclusive hotel. Only a few feet away were hundreds of gay guests chatting and laughing, with no idea of the terrible tragedy so near them.

In the corner of the room I could see her maid sobbing hysterically.

"Oh—*niña—niña*," cried the maid, whose name I learned afterward was Juanita. "She was *muy simpatica—muy simpatica*."

" '*Niña*,' " remarked Kennedy to us in an undertone, "means 'little girl,' the familiar term for mistress. As for '*muy simpatica*,' it means, literally, 'very sympathetic,' but really can not be done justice to in English. It is that charming characteristic of personal attractiveness, the result of a sweet disposition."

He looked down keenly at the woman before us.

"I can well imagine that she had it, that she was *muy simpatica*."

While Craig was taking in the situation, I turned to McBride and asked—

"Who was Madame Valcour—where did she come from?"

"You haven't heard of her?" he repeated. "Well—I'm not surprised after all. Really I can't say I know much about her myself—except that she was a beauty and attracted everybody's attention here at the hotel. Among other things, she was a friend of Colonel Sinclair, I believe. You know him, don't you—the retired army-engineer—interested in Mexican mines and railroads, and a whole lot of things? Oh, you've seen his name in the newspapers often enough. Lately, you know, he has been experimenting with air-ships for the army—has a big estate out on Long Island."

Kennedy nodded.

"Rather a remarkable chap, I've heard."

"I don't know whether you know it or not," continued McBride, "but we seem to have quite a colony of Mexican refugees here at the Vanderveer. She seemed to be one of them—at least she seemed to know them all. I think she was a Frenchwoman. At least, you know how all the Latin-Americans seem naturally to gravitate to Paris and how friendly the French are toward them."

"How did you come to discover her?" asked Kennedy, bending over her again. "She couldn't have been dead very long."

"Well—she came into the hotel during the dinner-hour. As nearly as I can find out, the elevator boy, who seems to have been the only person who observed her closely, says that she acted as if she were dazed.

"They tell me her maid was out at the time. But about half an hour after Madame came in, there was a call for her over the telephone. The operator got no answer from her room, although the boy had seen her go up and the young lady who is floor-clerk on the tenth floor said she had not gone out."

"Did the person on the telephone leave any message—give any name?" asked Craig.

"Yes. It was a man who seemed to be very much excited—said that it was Señor Morelos—just Señor Morelos—she would know."

"What then?"

"Why, when he found he couldn't get her, he rang off. A few minutes later her maid Juanita came in. The moment she opened the door with her key, she gave a scream and fainted."

"Suicide?" I ventured under my breath to Kennedy, as McBride paused.

Craig said nothing. He was making a careful examination of both the room and of the body on the bed.

A moment later he looked up quickly, then bent down farther.

On her arm he had discovered a peculiar little red mark!

Gently, as if he would not hurt such an exquisite creature even in death, he squeezed a tiny drop of blood from the little puncture and caught it on a sterilized glass slide of a microscope, which he carried in a small compact emergency-case in his pocket.

He continued to rummage the room.

Thrown carelessly into a top drawer of the dressing-table was a chatelaine. He opened it. There seemed to be nothing there except several articles of feminine vanity. In the bottom, however, was a little silver box which he opened. There lay a number of queer little fuzzy buttons—at least they looked like buttons. He took one, examined it closely, found it rather soft, tasted it—made a wry face and dropped the whole thing into his pocket.

A HEAVY tap sounded on the door. McBride opened it. It was our old friend, Dr. Leslie, the coroner.

"Well," he exclaimed taking in the whole situation, and hardly more surprised at seeing us than at the strangeness of the handsome figure on the bed. "Well—what is all this?"

McBride shook his head gravely and repeated substantially what he had already told us.

There is no need to go into the lengthy investigation that the coroner conducted. He questioned one servant and employee after another, without eliciting any more real information than we had already obtained.

The maid was quite evidently a Mexican and spoke very little and very poor English. She seemed to be in great distress, and as far as we could determine it was genuine. Through her broken English and our own fragmentary knowledge of Spanish, we managed to extract her story, about as McBride had told it.

Madame Valcour had engaged her in Paris, where she had been taken and later had been thrown on her own resources by a family which had been ruined in the revolution in Mexico. As for a Monsieur Valcour, she had never seen him. She thought that Madame was a widow.

As the questioning continued, I read between the lines, however, that Madame Valcour was in all probability an adventuress of a high order, one of those female soldiers of fortune who, in Paris, London, New York, and all large cities, seem to have a way of bobbing up at the most unexpected moments, in some way connected, through masculine frailty, with great national and international events.

The questioning over, the coroner ordered that the body be sent down to one of the city hospitals where an autopsy could be performed, and we rode down in the elevator together.

"Extraordinary — most extraordinary," repeated Dr. Leslie as we paused for a moment in an angle of the lobby to discuss the conclusion of his preliminary investigation. "There is just one big point, though, that we shall have to clear up before we can go ahead with anything else. What was the cause of death? There was no gas in the room. It couldn't have been illuminating gas, then. It must have been a poison of some kind."

"You assume then that it was suicide?" asked Kennedy keenly.

"I assume nothing—yet," replied the aged coroner, quickly backing water, and affecting the air of one who could say much if he chose but was stopped by professional and official etiquette.

"You'll keep me informed as to what you do discover?" asked Kennedy with a deference that could not fail to be ingratiating.

"Indeed I will," answered the coroner, cordially taking the flattery. "Now I must be off—let me see—an accident case. Yes indeed, Kennedy, I shall be only too glad to keep you informed and to have your cooperation on the case."

"Poison of some kind," repeated Kennedy as Dr. Leslie disappeared. "Sounds very simple when you put it that way. I wish I could handle the whole thing for him. However, I suspect he'll come around in a day or two—begging me to help him save his precious reputation and find out what it really is."

"I know what he'll do," asserted McBride with a scowl. "He'll take this chance to rub it in on the Vanderveer. We've had a couple of suicides since we opened. It isn't our fault if such things happen. But somehow or other it seems to appeal to the city official to blame some private agency for anything like this. I tell you, Kennedy, we've got to protect the reputation of the hotel against such things. Now, if you'll take the case, I'll see that you don't lose anything by it."

"Gladly," replied Kennedy, to whom a mystery was as the breath of life. Then he added with a smile, "I had tacitly assumed as much after you spoke to me."

"I meant that you should," agreed McBride, "and I thank you. Only it is just as well that we understand each other clearly at the outset."

"Exactly. Has anything in Madame Valcour's actions about the hotel offered a clue—ever so slight?" asked Craig, plunging into the case eagerly.

"Perhaps," hesitated McBride as if trying to separate something that might be trivial from that which might be really important. "When she came here about a week ago, she left word at the telephone-desk that if a Señor Morelos should call, she was at home."

"Morelos?" repeated Kennedy. "That is the name of the man who called up tonight. Did he call?"

"Not as far as I can find out."

"But she must have had other callers," pursued Craig, evidently thinking of the attractiveness of the woman.

"Yes indeed," answered McBride, "plenty of them. In fact, she seemed never to be able to stir about downstairs without having some one looking at her and ogling."

"Which is no crime," put in Craig.

"No," agreed McBride, "and to be perfectly fair to her, she never gave any of them any encouragement, as far as I could see."

"You mentioned that she was a friend of Colonel Sinclair's," prompted Kennedy.

"Oh yes," recollected McBride. "He called on her—once, I think. Then for a couple of days she was away—out on Long Island, I believe she left word. It seems that there is a sort of Summer settlement of Mexicans and Latin-Americans generally out there, at a place called Seaville. It was only today that she returned from her visit."

"Seaville," repeated Kennedy. "That is out somewhere near Westport, the home of Sinclair, isn't it?"

"I believe it is," remarked McBride.

He was chewing his unlighted cigar thoughtfully, as we tried to piece together the fragmentary bits of the story.

Suddenly he removed the cigar contemplatively.

"I have been wondering," he said slowly, "just what she was here for anyway. I can't say that there is anything that throws much light on the subject. But she was so secretive, she threw such an air of mystery about herself, never told any one much about her goings-out or comings-in, and in fact seemed to be so careful—well, I've just been wondering whether she wasn't mixed up in some plot or other, wasn't playing a deeper game than we suspect with these precious friends of hers."

I looked at McBride attentively. Was he merely mystified by having had to deal with a foreigner who naturally was not as easy to understand as a native, or was the general impression he sought to convey really founded on that instinct which no true detective can afford to be without?

"In other words," McBride pursued, uninterrupted by Kennedy who was only too glad to glean any impression the house-man might have received, "I was never quite able to fathom her. You see, yourself, that she could not even have made much of a confidant of her maid. She was just the type I should pick out as—as the agent of somebody."

"You mean that she was playing a game?" I interjected.

"Yes," he acquiesced. "You know as well as I do that if any one wants to accomplish anything, get information that it is hard to get, the first thing necessary is to employ a woman of the world. Why men will tell their inmost secrets to a clever woman, if she knows how to play the game right. I can't persuade myself that—that it was all perfectly straight. She must have had a purpose in being here. I don't know what it could be. But—well—this tragedy shows that there must be something hidden under the surface. She—she might have been a spy."

Kennedy was watching McBride's face encouragingly, but without a word so far.

He was evidently thinking of Colonel Sinclair. Sinclair, I knew, was a very wealthy mine-owner down in the southern state of Oaxaca in Mexico. I recalled having seen him once or twice—a tall, wiry, muscular man on whose face the deep tan showed that he had lived for years in the neighborhood of the tropical sun. Could Colonel

Sinclair know anything of the mysterious death of Madame Valcour?

"A spy," pondered Kennedy at length. "What other people have you seen her with—or have reason to think she was with?"

"Why," replied McBride contemplatively, "I understand that she used to go around a good deal to a place which they call the Mexican-American Tea-Room—just around the corner from here."

"The Mexican-American Tea-Room. Do you know anything of the place?"

"Not much—only that it seems to be frequented largely by people in the city who want to discuss affairs down in Mexico to the accompaniment of dishes that are hot with peppers and chillies. It's a peculiar place. They have a cabaret upstairs in the evening. I believe it is — well — pretty swift."

Kennedy seemed at last to have received some hint that indicated a possible line of action.

"I think I'll drop in there before Leslie gives this thing out to the papers," he decided. "Walter—come on—this is the life!"

CHAPTER II

THE MEXICAN CABARET

WE EASILY found the Mexican-American cabaret and tea-room which McBride had mentioned. McBride himself refused to accompany us because it was likely that some of Valcour's visitors, if they happened to be there, might recognize him. Kennedy was better pleased to have it that way also, for McBride, whatever his other merits, had detective stamped over him from his hat on the back of his head down to his square-toed shoes.

The house was an old-fashioned, high-stooped structure, just around the corner from the Vanderveer, in the neighborhood where business was rapidly replacing residences.

Apparently the entrance was through what had once been a basement, but which had been remodeled.

We entered the low door. There did not seem to be anybody dining downstairs. But now and then sounds indicated that upstairs there were many people, and that they were thoroughly enjoying the entertainment the cabaret afforded.

Passing by a dark-skinned individual who seemed to serve as both waiter and look-out for the room downstairs, we mounted the steps, and on the parlor-floor found a full-fledged cabaret in operation.

With a hasty, all-inclusive glance about, Craig selected a seat down near a little platform where there were several performers and a small dancing-floor fringed with little tables and chairs.

Fortunately it was such a place as New Yorkers in search of the picturesque often drop in upon, especially with friends from out of town, and our entrance did not, therefore, excite any comment whatever.

A waiter promptly appeared beside us, and Kennedy leisurely scanned a bill of fare which enumerated all sorts of tortillas, chilli con carnes, tamals and frijoles. We ordered and began to look about us.

It was as strange and interesting a gathering as one could have found anywhere in the city. As nearly as I could make out there were refugees from Mexico, of every class and condition and nationality, who seemed to be in the habit of meeting there nightly. There were soldiers of fortune preparing to go down there if they got the chance. Here was a man who had fled from Vera Cruz on a transport, there was another aching to get away and break into the country as soon as there were any signs of the lifting of the embargo.

There were Mexicans, Americans, English, French, Germans—all who were interested in the unhappy republic south of us, all talking in animated tones, except now and then when a mutual confidence was exchanged between some of them, all seeming to know each other, if not to be on friendly terms with one another. What was seething under the surface an outsider could not judge. But of one thing I felt certain. If Valcour had been of this group, certainly none of them showed any knowledge of the tragedy, or if they did they were consummate actors and actresses.

THE music, furnished by a piano, mandolins and guitars on the platform, started up.

Across from us was a party of men and women talking to a woman, dark-eyed and olive-skinned, the type of Spanish dancing-girl. As the music started the girl rose.

"Who is that?" asked Craig of the waiter who had brought us our order.

"Señora Ruiz," he replied briefly, "one of our best dancers."

We watched her intently. There was something fascinating about the woman. From the snap of her black eyes to the vibrating grace of her shapely ankle there was something that stamped her as unique. She seemed to realize the power nature had given her over the passions of men, to have the keen wit to play them off, and the joy of living to appreciate the dramas which were enacted.

She began with the *danza de sombrero*. A sombrero was placed on the floor and she danced about it, in and out, now drawing near and now gliding away without touching it. There was something fascinating, not so much about the dance as about the dancer, for the dance itself was interminable, monotonous.

Several times I saw that Kennedy had caught her eye, and when at last the dance ended she contrived to finish close to our table, so close that it was but a turn, an exchange of looks, a word or two, and, as cabaret dancers will, she was sitting at our table a moment later and Kennedy was ordering something.

The Señora spoke very good English and French, and the conversation glided along like a dance from one subject to another, for she had danced her way into almost every quarter of the gay world of America and Europe.

It was not long before Kennedy and she were discussing Mexican dances and somehow or other those of the south of Mexico were mentioned. The orchestra, meanwhile, had burst forth into a tango, followed by a maxixe, and many of the habitués of the cabaret were now themselves dancing.

"The Zapotecs," remarked Kennedy, "have a number of strange dances. There is one called the Devil Dance that I have often wished to see."

"The Devil Dance?" she repeated. "That usually takes place on feast-days of the saints. I have seen it often. On those occasions some of the dancers have their bodies painted to represent skeletons, and they also wear strange, feathered head-dresses."

The waiter responded with our order.

"The Zapotec ballroom," she continued reminiscently, "is an open space near a village, and there the dance goes on by the light of a blazing fire. The dancers, men and women, are dressed in all kinds of fantastic costumes."

So from dancing the conversation drifted along to one topic after another, Kennedy showing a marvelous knowledge of things Mexican, mostly, I suspected, second-hand, for he had a sort of skill in such a situation of confining the subjects, if he chose, to those on which he was already somewhat acquainted.

"Señora," called a voice from the other table at which she had been sitting.

She turned with a gay smile. Evidently the party of friends were eager to have her back.

Some words passed, and in a few moments we found ourselves at the other table with the rest of Señora Ruiz's friends. No one seemed to think it strange in this Bohemian atmosphere that two newcomers should be added to the party. In fact, I rather suspected that they welcomed us as possibly lightening the load of paying the checks which the waiters brought for various things ordered, none of which were exactly reasonable in price.

AMONG others whom we met was an American, a Western mining-woman whom all seemed to know as Hattie Hawley. She was of the breezy type that the West has produced, interested in Mexican affairs through having purchased an interest in some mines in the southern part of the country, and seemed to be thoroughly acquainted with the methods of Wall Street in exploiting mines.

It was a rapid-fire conversation that they carried on, and I kept silent for the most part, fearing that I might say the wrong thing, and following Kennedy's lead as much as possible.

Mrs. Hawley happened to be sitting next to Kennedy, and as the talk turned on the situation in the country in which all seemed to be interested in some way, Kennedy ventured to her—

"Do you know Colonel Sinclair?"

"I should say I do," she replied frankly. "Why, it was only a few days ago that he came in here and we were all sitting at this very table discussing the situation down in Oaxaca. You know, I'm interested in some mines near Colonel Sinclair's, and in the same railroad through the region which he controls."

"He isn't here tonight, then?" pursued Kennedy.

"No," she answered. "I suppose he is out on Long Island at his place at Westport. A fine boy, the Colonel. We all like him."

There was no mistaking the tone in which she made the remark. Even if it sounded a little unconventional, it was merely her way of testifying that she had a high regard for the gentleman.

"I have known the Colonel fairly well for a number of years," prevaricated Kennedy, and the conversation drifted on to other topics.

Kennedy managed to lead it about again so that in a perfectly inconsequential way, after the mention of Sinclair's name, he could say—

"I have heard him mention the name of a Madame Val—" he hesitated, as if the name were not familiar, "a Madame Valcour, I think it is. Is she here? Does she come around to the cabaret?"

"Oh yes," replied Hattie Hawley. "She comes around here quite often. I haven't seen her tonight though. She has been away for a few days—down on Long Island, I believe. Perhaps she is there yet."

I caught her looking significantly at Kennedy, and wondered what was coming next.

She leaned over and whispered—

"Between you and me, I think the Colonel is stuck on her, only I wouldn't say that aloud here."

She flashed a glance at one of the men who had been sitting in the shadow, talking with Señora Ruiz.

"He could tell you more about her than I could," she remarked under her breath. "I never saw any one so crazy over a woman as he is over Valcour."

"And does she care for him?" asked Kennedy.

Hattie Hawley considered for a moment.

"I don't believe she cares for anybody," she answered.

At least there was no hint that the tragedy was known yet here.

I glanced more closely at the man who was talking to Ruiz. He was dark-faced, tall, military in bearing, straight as an arrow, with a little black imperial and a distinguished shock of bushy dark hair.

"It's evident that she is an ardent admirer of him," remarked Kennedy following my eye, "whatever he may think of her." Then, louder, he asked of Mrs. Hawley, "What is his name? I don't believe I caught it when we were introduced—that is, if we were, in this very informal meeting."

She laughed. Evidently she liked it.

"His name is Sanchez," she replied.

A snatch of conversation from a side table floated over to us.

"Whoever can learn how to get at the key and decipher those hieroglyphics will not only add a chapter to archeology, but he'll be rich—in my opinion—enormously rich. Why, my dear sir, there is more treasure in Mexico today that has never——"

The voice was drowned in the din of the orchestra starting up a new dance.

Kennedy turned. At another table were two men talking earnestly. One was the very type of the German savant, including the whiskers and the near-sighted glasses. The other looked very much as if he were an American college professor.

The savant, at least, seemed to be at home in the Bohemian atmosphere, but the other man looked for all the world as if he momentarily expected to be discovered by some of his students and have his reputation ruined forever.

"Who is that?" asked Kennedy of Mrs. Hawley. "Do you know them?"

"At the next table?" she answered looking around. "Why, that is Professor Neumeyer, Freidrich Neumeyer, the German archeologist. He has been all over Mexico—Yucatan, Mitla, the pyramids, wherever there are ruins. I never cared much about ruins—guess I'm too modern. But Colonel Sinclair does. He goes in for all that sort of thing—has collections of his own, and all that.

"I believe he and Neumeyer are great friends. I don't know the other man, but he looks like one of the professors from the University."

Kennedy continued to divide his attention between the party at our table and the archeologist. His companion, as I myself had observed, seemed entirely out of place outside a classroom or archeological museum, and I soon dismissed him from my thoughts.

But Neumeyer was different. There was a fascination about him, and in fact I felt that I would really like to know the old fellow well enough to have him tell me the tales of adventure combined with scholarship, with which I felt intuitively he must be bursting.

AS THE hour grew later more people arrived, and the groups were continually splitting up and new ones being formed. Thus it came about that Kennedy and myself, having been set down I suppose as mere sightseers, found ourselves at last alone at the table, while Señora Ruiz and another gay party were chatting in animated tones farther down the room.

I looked at Craig inquiringly, but he shook his head and said in a whisper:

"I hardly think we are well acquainted enough yet to do much circulating about the room. It would look too much like 'butting in.' If any one speaks to us we can play them along, but we had better not do much speaking ourselves—yet."

It was a novel experience and I thoroughly enjoyed it, as I did every new phase of life in cosmopolitan New York.

The hour was growing late, however, and I began to wonder whether anything else was going to happen, when I saw a waiter go down quietly and speak to Señora Ruiz. A moment later the party of which she was a member rose and one by one disappeared up what had been the stairs of the house when it was formerly a residence. Others rose and followed, perhaps ten or a dozen, all of whom I recognized as intimate friends.

It had no effect on the crowd below, further than to reduce it slightly and put an end to the dancing of Ruiz.

"Private dining-rooms upstairs?" inquired Kennedy nonchalantly of the waiter as he came around again for orders.

"Yes," he replied. "There's a little party on up there in one of them tonight."

Our friend Neumeyer and his guest had left some time before, and now there seemed to be little reason why we should stay.

"We have gained an entrée, anyhow," observed Kennedy, moving as if he were going.

He rose, walked over to the door and out into the hall. Down the staircase we could hear floating snatches of conversation from above. In fact it seemed as if in several of the dining-rooms there were parties of friends. One was particularly gay, and it was easy to conjecture that that was the party of which Señora Ruiz was the life.

Craig rejoined me at the table quickly, having looked about at practically all the private dining-rooms without exciting suspicion.

"It's all very interesting," he observed to me. "But although it has added to our list of acquaintances considerably, I can't say this visit has given us much real information. Still you never can tell, and until I am ready to come out in what I call my 'open investigation,' these are acquaintances worth cultivating. I have no doubt that Valcour and Sinclair would have been welcomed by that Ruiz party, and certainly from their actions it can not be that it is generally known yet that Valcour is dead."

"No," I agreed.

I had been going over in my mind the names of those we had met and the names I had heard mentioned. Not once had any one said the name of Morelos.

"There has been no one of the name of Morelos here," I suggested to Craig.

"No," he answered with a covert glance around. "And I did not make any inquiries. You may have noticed that all these people here seem to be supporters of the Government. I was about to inquire about him once when it suddenly occurred to me that he might be connected with the rebels, the Constitutionalists. I thought it would be discretion to refrain from even mentioning his name before these Federals."

"Then perhaps Sinclair is playing the game with both factions," I conjectured hastily, adding, "and Valcour was doing the same—is that what you mean?"

"The dancing has begun again," he hinted to me, changing the subject to one less dangerous.

I took the hint and for a few moments we watched the people in the sensuous mazes of some of the new steps. Intently as I looked, I could see not the slightest evidence that any one in the cabaret knew of the terrible tragedy that had overtaken one of the habitués.

As I watched I wondered whether there might have been a love triangle of some kind. It had all been very unconventional. Had the Bohemian Valcour come between some of these fiery lovers? I could not help thinking of the modern dances, especially as Valcour must have danced them. I could almost imagine the flash of those tango-slippers and her beautiful ankle, the swaying of her lithe body. What might she not do in arousing passions?

Speculate as I might, however, I always came back to the one question, "Who was the mysterious Señor Morelos?"

I could think of no answer and was glad when Kennedy suggested that perhaps we had seen enough for one night.

CHAPTER III

THE SECRET SERVICE

WE HAD scarcely turned down the street when I noticed that a man in a slouch-hat, pulled down over his eyes, was walking toward us.

As he passed I thought he peered out at us suspiciously from under the shelter of the hat.

He turned and followed us a step or two.

"Kennedy!" he exclaimed.

If a fourteen-inch gun had been fired off directly behind us, I could not have been more startled. Here, in spite of all our haste and secrecy, we were followed, watched—even known.

Craig had wheeled about suddenly, prepared for anything.

For an instant we looked at the man, wondering what to expect next from him.

"By Jove! Walter!" exclaimed Kennedy, almost before I had time to take in the situation. "It's Burke of the Secret Service!"

"The same," greeted a now familiar voice. "How are you?" he asked joining us and walking slowly down the street.

"Working on a case," replied Kennedy colorlessly, meantime searching Burke's face to discover whether it might be to our advantage to take him in on the secret.

"How did you come here?"

We had turned the corner and were standing in the deserted street near an electric light. Burke unfolded a newspaper which he had rolled up and was carrying in his hand.

"These newspaper fellows don't let much get past them," he said with a nod and a twinkle of his eye toward me. "I suppose you have seen this?"

He handed us a "war" extra.

We had not seen it, for our prolonged stay in the Mexican cabaret had, for the time being at least, superseded the interest which had taken us into the Vanderveer in the first place to look at the ticker. In the meantime an enterprising newspaper had rushed out its late edition with an extra.

Across the top of the page in big red-ink letters sprawled the headline:

WAR SECRETS STOLEN

The news account, in a little box at the bottom of the page where it had evidently been dropped in at the last moment, was also in red. It was meager, but exciting:

> Plans which represent the greatest war secret of the Government have been stolen, it was learned today semi-officially in Washington.
>
> The entire machinery of the Secret Service has been put into operation to recover the stolen documents.
>
> Just what the loss is could not be learned by our correspondent from any one in authority, but the general activity of both the Secret Service and the War College seems to confirm the rumors current in the capital tonight.
>
> As nearly as can be ascertained, it is believed that the information, if it has fallen into the hands of the Mexican Government, may prove particularly dangerous, and, while official Washington is either denying or minimizing the loss, it is reported indirectly that if the truth were known it would arouse great public concern.

That was all. Only pressure of time and the limited space of the box in which the news appeared had prevented its elaboration into a column or two of conjecture.

"What were the plans?" both Craig and I asked almost together as we read the extra. "Is that what brings you to New York?"

Burke leaned over to us excitedly and though there was no possibility of being overheard whispered hoarsely—

"I couldn't have met any one I'd rather see just at this very moment."

He regarded us frankly a few seconds, then queried—

"You remember that case we had where the anarchist used wireless?"

"Yes," replied Kennedy, "telautomatics—exploding bombs at long range by Hertzian wave impulses."

"Exactly. Well—this case goes far beyond even that," pursued Burke with another glance around. "I need not ask you fellows if I can trust you. We understand each other." He lowered his voice even more. "The secret that has been stolen is the wireless control of aeroplanes and aerial torpedoes. They use a gyroscope in it—and—oh—I don't know anything much about mechanics," he added floundering hopelessly, "but I do know about crime and criminals, and there is some big criminal at work here. That's in my line, even if I don't know much about science."

"Where were the plans stolen?" asked

Kennedy. "Surely not from the Government itself in Washington?"

"No," answered Burke. "They were stolen out on Long Island, at Westport. Colonel Sinclair, the retired army engineer, had a model——"

"Colonel Sinclair?" broke in Kennedy, in turn surprised.

"Yes. You know him?"

Burke looked at Craig for a moment as if he were positively uncanny, and perhaps knew all about what the Secret Service man was about to say, even before he had said it.

Kennedy smiled.

"Not personally," he replied. "But I have run across him in connection with a case which I am interested in. I understood that he was a friend of a Madame Valcour who has just been discovered dead up at the Vanderveer. It is a most mysterious case. She——"

"Madame Valcour?" interrupted Burke, now in turn himself surprised. "What sort of looking woman was she?"

Kennedy described her briefly, and ran over as much of the case as he felt it prudent to talk about at present.

"She's one of the very persons I'm trying to get a line on!" ejaculated Burke. "There's a sort of colony of Latin-Americans out there, across the bay from Sinclair's. Sinclair knew her—had been automobiling and motor-boating with her. And she's dead, you say?"

Kennedy nodded.

"Only my old friend the coroner, Dr. Leslie, stands in the way of saying how and by what," he confirmed impatiently. "What do you know about her?"

Burke had fallen into a study.

"I suspected some of those people out there at Seaville," he resumed slowly. "I found out that when they are in the city they usually drop in at that Mexican cabaret down the street."

"We have just come from it," interjected Kennedy.

"There seemed to be hardly any of them left out at Seaville," went on Burke. "If any of them has pulled off anything, they have all come to New York for cover. My people at Washington hurried me up to Westport first, and after I looked over the ground I saw nothing to do but come back to New York to watch these Mexicans. I am told they make a sort of rendezvous out of this cabaret."

"That's strange," considered Kennedy thoughtfully.

'Whom did you meet in the cabaret?" asked Burke.

"We just went in, like any other sightseers," replied Craig. "There was a Señora Ruiz, dancing there——"

"Yes," put in Burke. "She lives out there at Seaville. Has a cottage on the hill back of the hotel which she had leased for the season. Any one else?"

"There was a man named Sanchez."

"Another one," added Burke excitedly. "He stayed at the hotel—jealous as the the deuce of Valcour, too, they say. She was stopping at the hotel. You can imagine that Sanchez and Sinclair are not—well—just exactly pals," finished Burke. "Any one else?"

"Oh, several others," said Kennedy. "We were introduced and sat next to a Mrs. Hawley."

"She's a peculiar woman, as nearly as I can learn," remarked Burke. "I don't think she liked Valcour much. I haven't been able to make out yet whether it was just because her interests were similar to those of Sinclair or whether there was something more to it, but if the Colonel would only say the word, I guess she wouldn't stop long in saying 'Yes.' You see, I've only started on the case—just got into New York and haven't had a chance to see any of these people yet. I'm giving you only the impressions I got out there from the people I talked to. Sinclair, as nearly as I can make out, 'loves the ladies,' to quote the cabaret song to that effect, but I don't think there is any particular lady."

"It's a peculiar situation," chimed in Craig. "Señora Ruiz, it seemed to me, thinks that Sanchez is just about right. And he is a rather striking-looking fellow, too. There's one person, though, Burke, that I didn't see or hear about, who interests me. Did you hear anything about a chap named Morelos?"

"Morelos—Morelos," repeated Burke. "The name is familiar. No—I didn't hear anything about him, in this case. But—why, yes. He wouldn't be with these people. He's one of the Revolutionist junta, here in the city. These people are all Government supporters."

"I thought as much," agreed Kennedy. "But you know him?"

"I never had anything to do with him,"

replied Burke. "But I believe the Government—our Government—has had a good deal of trouble with him about the embargo on arms, since it was reëstablished. He has been shipping them down there when he gets a chance. I can find out all about him for you, though."

"I wish you would," said Craig, "but the plans—how did they happen to be in Westport? What connection did Sinclair have with them?"

"Well, you see, the thing was the invention of Colonel Sinclair," explained Burke. "I saw him, and although I couldn't get him to talk much about these people—I suppose he was afraid to, for fear of his interests in Mexico—he was ready enough to talk about his invention. He told me he had never patented it, that it was too valuable to patent. He has been working on it for years, and only recently perfected it. As soon as it seemed likely that there might eventually be hostilities, he took a trip to Washington and gave it outright to the Government."

"Mighty patriotic," I commented.

"Yes," agreed Burke. "The Colonel is a big man all right. You see this was one of his hobbies. He has spent thousands of dollars of his own money on it. There were two sets of plans made—one which he took to Washington and one which he kept himself out on his estate on Long Island. His own plans out there are those that have been stolen, not the plans that he gave to the Government."

"The Government had accepted them, then?" queried Craig.

"Yes, indeed. They sent experts up to look at his machine, went over the thing thoroughly. Oh, there is no doubt about it."

"You certainly have made a good start," commented Kennedy.

"I haven't had much time, it's true," said Burke modestly. "Sinclair had Washington on long-distance as soon as he discovered the theft, and I was taken off a case and hustled up to Westport immediately, without much chance to find out what it was all about."

"What did you find up there?" asked Kennedy.

Burke shook his head.

"As far as I can make out," he answered, "it must have been a most remarkable theft. The plans were stolen from Sinclair's safe, in his own library. And you can imagine that Sinclair is not the sort who would have an old-fashioned, antiquated safe, either. It was small, but one of the latest type."

"What did they do—drill it or use soup?" cut in Craig.

"Neither, as far as I could see," replied Burke. "That's perhaps the most remarkable feature of the whole thing. How the fellow got into the safe is more than I can figure out. There wasn't a mark of violence on it. Yet it had been opened. Not a soul in the world knew the combination except Sinclair, and he says that if he should happen to forget it or to die the safe would have to be drilled open. But they got in, nevertheless, and they seemed to know just what to take and the value that might be attached to it."

As Burke proceeded with the details of the amazing case, Kennedy became more and more interested. For the moment, he forgot all about Valcour, or at least concluded that we had unexpectedly crossed a trail that would aid in the solution of that case.

BURKE had drawn from his capacious pocket a small but rather heavy apparatus, and, as we gathered about, displayed it under the light of the electric lamp overhead.

"Sinclair found this thing in his study the next morning," he explained. "The thieves, whoever they were, must have left it in their hurry to get away after they found the plans."

I looked at it uncomprehendingly. It was a small box, flattened so that it could be easily carried in a coat-pocket.

Craig opened it. Inside was what seemed to be a little specially constructed dry battery, and in another compartment a most peculiar instrument, something like a diminutive flat telephone transmitter. It was connected by flexible silk-covered wires to ear-pieces that fitted over the head, after the manner of the headgear used by telephone operators or operators in wireless.

"I can make nothing out of it," confessed Burke, as Kennedy turned the thing over and over, shook it, fitted it on his head, examined it again, and then replaced the whole thing in its neat, compact box.

"I suppose you have no objection to my keeping this for a day or so?" he asked.

"None—if you can tell me what it is," agreed Burke.

"You are positive that the safe had been opened?" asked Kennedy a moment later.

"We have Sinclair's word," asserted Burke. "That is all I know, and I assume that he is telling the truth. There couldn't be any object in giving the invention to the Government and then robbing himself. No, if you knew Sinclair you'd know that about a thing like this he is as straight as a string. I feel that I can say positively that the papers were in the safe when it was locked by him for the night. He told me he put them there himself. And when he opened the safe in the morning they were gone.

"And, mind you, Kennedy, there wasn't a mark of any kind on the safe—not a mark. I went over it with a glass and couldn't find a thing, not a scratch—not even a finger-print—nothing except this queer arrangement which Sinclair himself found."

"Why," I exclaimed, "it sounds incredible—supernatural."

"It does indeed," asserted Burke. "It's beyond me."

Kennedy closed the cover of the little case and slipped the thing into his pocket, still pondering.

"It grows more incredible, too," pursued Burke, looking at us frankly. "And then, to top it all off, when I do get back to the city I happen to run across you fellows hot on the trail of the death of Valcour herself—whatever she may be or have to do with the case. There's only one thing Sinclair will not talk about freely and that is women—and this precious crew of Mexican friends of his. I'm afraid we shall have to go it alone on that end of it, without any assistance from him. All I was able to get, besides a word or two from him, was the gossip out there." He paused, then went on, "I wonder if we can't pool our interests, Kennedy, and work together on these cases?"

"Burke," exclaimed Craig, for the moment showing a glimpse of the excitement that was surging through his mind, "I had no idea when I took up this case of Valcour for McBride of the Vanderveer that I should be doing my country a service also. When are you going up to Westport again?"

Burke looked at his watch. He was evidently considering what Kennedy had told him about the Mexican cabaret. It was growing late and there was little chance of his getting anything there now, or in fact tomorrow, until night-time came again.

"I can go tomorrow," he answered, evidently only too glad to have Kennedy's cooperation. "I'll go up there with you myself at any time you say."

"I shall be ready and meet you at the earliest train," replied Craig.

Burke extended a hand to each of us as we parted.

Kennedy shook it cordially.

"We must succeed in unraveling this affair now at any cost," he said simply.

CHAPTER IV

THE GYROSCOPE AEROPLANE

EARLY the following morning we met Burke in the Long Island corner of the Pennsylvania Station. It had been late enough when we parted the night before, and as far as we knew nothing further had occurred in either the Sinclair robbery or the Valcour murder cases.

It was an early train and we had it mostly to ourselves, for we were starting even before the flood of the stream of commuters began, going the other way, toward the city.

As our train whisked us along Craig leaned back in his chair and surveyed the glimpses of water and countryside through the window. Now and then, as we got farther out from the city, through a break in the trees one could catch glimpses of the deep blue salt water of bay and sound and the dazzling whiteness of the sand in the clear morning air.

It was a pleasant ride, but we made it in silence and, without wasting any time, at a livery stable across from the quaint little Westport station we secured a rig and hastened out to Colonel Sinclair's.

The house was situated on a neck of land, with the restless waters of the Sound on one side and the calmer waters of the bay on the other.

Westport Bay itself lay in a beautifully wooded, hilly country, and Sinclair's house stood on an elevation, with a huge sweep of terraced lawn before it, running down to the water's edge.

As we pulled up under the wide stone ivy-covered porte-cochère, Sinclair, who had been awaiting us anxiously after the receipt of a telegram from Burke, greeted us and led the way into his library, a large room crowded with curios and objects of art which he had collected on his travels in Latin-America.

Sinclair was a tall, lithe, wiry man with a seamed and furrowed face. I noticed particularly his loose-jointed but very deft manner of handling himself and could not help thinking that it marked him as a born bird-man.

It was a superb literary and scientific workshop overlooking the bay, with a stretch of several miles of sheltered water.

Sinclair, however, was evidently very much worried about several things.

"Tell me," he asked anxiously before we were fairly in the library, "is—is it true—that story in the newspapers about Madame Valcour?"

"Yes, I'm afraid it is," replied Burke, hastening to introduce us and at the same time watching Sinclair's face narrowly.

"You knew her, I believe?" asked Kennedy.

"Yes," he replied guardedly. "In fact, only the day before, I was out with her in my new boat, the *Streamline*, which you can see down there anchored just off the dock."

He looked away and pointed down and across the bay. "She was staying at that hotel—the Seaville House."

A quick look from Burke told us that that was where the colony of Mexicans had established themselves, spending the Summer, and I recalled that he had said that Señora Ruiz had hired a cottage back of the hotel and up the hill.

Sinclair had evidently said about all he was disposed to say on the subject, and Kennedy led the conversation around to the robbery.

The Colonel repeated substantially the same story we had already heard from Burke.

"And you found nothing—no marks—have no clue?" asked Craig who had been following attentively.

"Nothing except that peculiar instrument I gave Burke," replied Sinclair. "You have seen it? What do you suppose it is, Burke?"

The Secret Service man nodded a blank negative.

Kennedy had drawn the thing from his pocket.

"I have studied it carefully," he said simply.

He dropped down on his knees before the now-closed safe and opened the strange contrivance which Sinclair had found.

We watched in silence as Kennedy placed the peculiar telephone-like transmitter close to the combination lock and turned the combination slowly.

Suddenly he rose, gave the bolts a twist, and the heavy little door swung open!

"This is how your safe was opened so quickly," he cried.

We looked in utter amazement.

"How did you do it?" asked Sinclair.

"With the burglar's microphone," he answered. "The microphone is now used by cracksman for picking combination-locks. When you turn the lock a slight sound is made when the proper number comes opposite the working-point. It can be heard sometimes by a sensitive ear, although it is imperceptible to most persons. But by using a microphone it is easy to hear the sounds which allow of opening the lock."

"Well—I'll—be—hanged!" gasped Sinclair.

IT WAS difficult to determine whether Burke or Sinclair had been the more impressed by the seeming wizardry of Kennedy in discovering how the safe had been opened. That point, however, was at present at least of minor importance to Kennedy. Not only was it necessary but he was most interested in knowing about the wonderful contrivance of Sinclair's which had called forth such ingenuity in order to get possession of it.

"Just what is your gyroscope aeroplane, Colonel?" he asked.

With the true spirit of the inventor, Sinclair was now all enthusiasm, and was prepared to talk of nothing else except this child of his brain.

"It is a crewless aeroplane," he explained eagerly. "It is exactly as if you sat here in this room and merely by manipulating a series of keys could control the action of either an aeroplane or a submarine—anything that moves by power—miles away.

"You catch what it means," he went on. "That thing might carry enough of the most powerful explosive to blow up the locks of the Panama Canal, to send any of our superdreadnoughts to the bottom, if it were directed against us.

"In the hands of an enemy there is no telling what might not happen. He could send one of these infernal, self-propelled, safely directed machines where and when he wanted it and could explode it at exactly the moment, when it would do the most damage."

He had risen and was pacing the room in excitement.

"Come out here," he added, "I'll show you the real thing."

Sinclair led the way to a concrete and sheet-iron hangar down the terrace toward the water's edge.

As he directed, a mechanician wheeled the aeroplane out on the runway in front of the hangar.

"This is the gyroscope," began Sinclair, pointing out a thing encased in an aluminum sheath which weighed, all told, perhaps fourteen or fifteen pounds.

"You understand," he continued, "the gyroscope is really a flywheel mounted on gimbals and can turn on any of its axes so that it can assume any angle in space. When it's at rest, like this, you can turn it easily. But when it is set revolving, it tends to persist always in the plane in which it was started rotating."

I took hold of it and it did turn readily in any direction that I desired. I could feel, as I turned it, the heavy little flywheel inside.

"There is a pretty high vacuum in that aluminum case," went on Sinclair. "There's very little friction on that account. The power to rotate the flywheel is obtained from this little dynamo here, run by the gas-engine which also turns the propellers of the aeroplane."

"But, suppose the engine should stop?" I asked sceptically. "How about the gyroscope?"

"It will go right on for several minutes. You know the Brennan monorail-car will stand up some time after the power is shut off. And I carry a small storage-battery that will run the gyroscope for some time too. That's all been guarded against."

He was the typical inventor, optimistic. Sinclair cranked the engine, a seven-cylindered affair, with the cylinders sticking out like the spokes of a wheel without a rim. The propellers turned so fast that I could not see the blades—turned with that strong, steady, fierce, droning buzz that can be heard a long distance and which is a thrilling sound to hear, wafted on the Summer breeze as if a hundred giant cicadas had broken loose to predict warm weather.

The inventor reached over and attached the little dynamo, at the same time setting the gyroscope at its proper angle and starting it.

"This is the mechanical brain of my new flyer," he remarked, patting the round aluminum case almost lovingly. "You can look in through this little window of glass which I have let into the case, and you can see the flywheel inside revolving—ten thousand revolutions a minute. Press down on it," he shouted to me.

As I placed both hands on the case of the apparently frail instrument, he added—"You remember how easily you moved it just a moment ago."

I pressed down with all my strength. Then I literally raised myself off my feet, resting my two hands on the case about the gyroscope. That uncanny little instrument seemed to resent—there is no other word that expresses it quite so well—resent my very touch. It was almost human, petulant with interference. Instead of yielding, it actually rose on the side I was pressing down!

Colonel Sinclair laughed at the puzzled look on my face. I took my hands off and the gyroscope leisurely and nonchalantly resumed its original position.

"Without going into the theory of the thing," explained Sinclair, "those are the properties I use—applied to the rudder and the ailerons—those little flat planes at the ends, between the two large main planes. That gives me automatic stability for the machine. I'm not going to take time to explain how it is done. But it is in the combination of the various parts that I have discovered the basic principle."

"How about the wireless control?" asked Kennedy, to whom the gyroscope was interesting but not new.

"I don't know whether you are familiar with the theory of wireless telegraphy or not," began Sinclair, to which Kennedy nodded an affirmative, forgetful of the rest of us. "But it has gone ahead fast during the past few years. The reason? Simple—very simple! In wireless telegraphy they have been able to discard coherers and relays and to use detectors of various kinds and microphones in their places.

"But in wireless telautomatics it is different. There we have been compelled to keep the coherer. That has been the trouble, that has been the thing that has held us back. The coherer is often spasmodic. We can't always depend on it.

"Well, I suppose you are acquainted with Hammond's mercury-steel disk coherer? I have improved on even that. So, I may say, we come finally to this coherer which I myself have invented for the special purpose of wireless-controlled vehicles of all kinds."

He paused and led us to a little kiosk or station on the edge of the bluff.

"This," he explained with pardonable pride, "is my radio-combinator. You see I have twelve numbers here on the keys—forward, back, start, stop propeller-motor, rudder right, rudder left, stop steering-motor, light signals front, light signals rear, launch air-torpedoes—there is one of them over in the corner—and so on.

"That instrument I call a telecommutator. Then, too, I use what is called an aerial coherer relay."

He paused a moment to let the thing sink into our minds. I had long since given up and had joined Burke in silent wonder. Not so with Kennedy. His mind ran along, if anything, ahead of Sinclair; and now and then he asked a question which elicited an answer that showed that Sinclair appreciated talking to him about his hobby.

"The idea," went on Sinclair again, "is that of delayed contact. You understand, the machinery to propel and steer the aeroplane is always ready. But when the right impulse is given to it, it actually delays a few seconds. That is so that the direction given can be automatically repeated back to me. Then if it should prove to be wrong or undesirable I can change it—instantly—before it is too late."

We were intensely interested, even if we could not follow all the details.

"Oh, there are many technicalities," he went on. "But you can see for yourself that it really takes no great experience to run the air-ship. You could do it—any one with common sense could do it after I had showed him once what to do. It is all done by merely paying attention to the signals and depressing the right key here, of a limited number.

"You see I have improved on all my predecessors—on Wilson and Gardner in England, Roberts in Australia, Wirth and Lirpa in Germany, Gabet in France, and Tesla, Edison, Sims, and the younger Hammond in our own country."

"I should like to see a trial," suggested Kennedy.

"I should be only too glad," returned Sinclair.

He depressed a lever.

"Of course," he observed, "you know that wireless power doesn't operate the aeroplane. The wireless waves merely operate a system of relays. The air-ship carries its own power, just like any other—with the exception of the gyroscope, of course. I control that power, sitting here, just as if I were aboard the aeroplane."

As I went over quickly in my mind the points he had touched on in our talk, I felt that everything had been thought out most carefully. And when I reflected that it all could be controlled automatically, or, perhaps better, telautomatically, I felt simply astounded.

Sinclair pointed again to the air-ship herself.

"You see," he went on, "when she is working automatically, the wireless impulses are carried to a short aerial, like a mast, sticking up there just a little above the planes."

The mechanician threw in a switch. The motor caught on. The air-ship hummed and trembled. The fumes of gasoline spread out through the air, stifling.

We watched the inventor with tense interest.

The mechanician retired and there was the air-ship, throbbing away, an inanimate thing, yet somehow now in my eyes endowed with life, with something akin to intelligence.

Sinclair merely depressed a key.

THE aeroplane rose under the unseen guidance of the wireless. Out she streaked from the run-way and shot up, up, up, with the flag flapping proudly from the upper plane. She swayed from side to side as the mechanism which operated the stabilizing by means of the ends of the planes, counteracting the puffs of wind from the land, did its work with an intelligence almost superior to that of man himself.

Upward she soared.

"Now," remarked Sinclair, flattered by the appreciative looks on our faces, "imagine that she is sailing along there, carrying death under her wings in the shape of my aerial torpedoes, or even plain ordinary bombs."

He pressed another key.

Far off we could see a speck seemingly detached from the aeroplane. It fell rapidly with gathering momentum. Suddenly it touched the water and a huge cloud of foam rose.

"Suppose there had been a ship or a hostile army under that," he said quietly.

It did not take a very vivid imagination to supply the context to such a supposition. I had already begun to look on Sinclair with a feeling almost akin to awe.

He depressed another key. The aeroplane turned, obeying his every whim. He depressed keys in quick succession. She cut a figure eight.

"Why," he cried in his enthusiasm, "I can do anything with that aeroplane you want. I have even turned her completely over and flown her upside down just as Pegoud did first. Look—you never saw that before."

"Why, she has stopped!" exclaimed Kennedy.

"Exactly. I can use the gyroscope for that—to make her hover in one spot just like a bird, riding the air waves, if you can call it that. Why, man, there isn't anything I can't do with this machine."

"And you never have any trouble with other wireless?" asked Craig.

"No, I have guarded against that," he said, starting the aeroplane again, turning it and directing it straight back at us like a huge, irresistible force sweeping at us and beyond our power to stop—yet obeying absolutely the magic touch of the little keys before him. "I am the only person who can interfere with it—I who know how to direct it."

"Not the only one—now," put in Kennedy quietly.

Sinclair in his enthusiasm over the machine itself had forgotten the very occasion of our being there.

His face clouded.

"No—you're right," he answered. "And for God's sake—get back that secret," he implored, as he brought the machine on down the bay back to its nesting place.

I was thrilled not only by his tone, but by the momentous possibilities in this long electric arm that could be stretched out through space to fight our battles.

Kennedy's words sent a horror-stricken thrill through me. What if that arm were stretched out against us, instead of for us, in war?

CHAPTER V

THE ARCHEOLOGIST

"THIS thing has begun to take on the nature of an epidemic," exclaimed Craig that afternoon after luncheon as he glanced at the early edition of the evening papers which had arrived at Westport and had been delivered to Colonel Sinclair.

On the first page stared the headline:

PROF. NEUMEYER, NOTED ARCHEOLOGIST, DIES SUDDENLY

We bent over and read the strange and hasty account:

> Prof. Friedrich Neumeyer, the famous archeologist and student of Mexico, was found dead among his treasures this morning by the caretaker of his apartments at — West —th Street.
>
> He had evidently returned late during the night and, instead of going directly to bed, had sat down to read, when he was suddenly stricken in some unknown manner. . . .
>
> Coroner Leslie, who was summoned immediately, refuses to discuss the case.

There was much more to the account, and the mystery with which the Coroner surrounded the affair had evidently impressed the newspapers with the idea that they had a big story.

Colonel Sinclair was palpably upset by the news.

"First it is Valcour," he exclaimed in unfeigned alarm, "now Neumeyer. Where will it end? Why, Neumeyer and I were old friends. He has visited me often out here. We have traveled together in Mexico. In fact it was with his assistance and advice that I gathered many of these curios which you see in this very room."

He waved his hand about at the wonderful collection he had made, for he was no mean student himself.

"A great man—Neumeyer," he continued, rummaging among some papers, "a student and a practical man, both."

Sinclair had drawn out a packet of letters and from it selected one.

"That's the sort of man he was," he said, spreading the letter out. "I don't mind you fellows knowing this, for I can trust you not to let it go further. These are letters he wrote me from Mitla several months ago, before the present trouble became so acute down there that he had to leave for New York."

The letter certainly showed that the two had been on intimate terms. The Professor wrote:

> Among other wonders of this place, I have been very much interested in a cavern, or, as the natives here call it, a *subterráneo*. It seems to have been built in the shape of a cross originally. Each arm of the cross probably extended about twelve feet underground.
>
> Tradition says that the center was guarded by a block of stone called "The Pillar of Death." There is a superstition repeated from mouth to mouth that whoever embraced this stone would die before the sun went down.
>
> I was also interested in learning that tradition says that from this cavern there once led a long underground passage across the court to another underground chamber which was full of Mixtec treasure. Treasure-hunters have dug around it, but nothing has ever been discovered. According to the gossip of the region, two old Indians are the only ones who know of the immense amount of buried gold and silver, but will not reveal it.

"That's the sort of fellow Neumeyer was," commented Sinclair thoughtfully, "always delving about and bringing up something not only of scientific value but of practical value as well. I'm going up to the city with you, if you are going," he added.

Kennedy had already despatched a wire to Dr. Leslie, telling him where we were and asking him to hold things in their present condition until we could get back.

THE coroner was waiting for us at the station when we arrived.

"I'm glad to see you," he greeted us after the introductions were over. "I've been trying to get you, Kennedy, all day."

He was plainly perplexed and made no effort to conceal it as he hurried us into his official car which was waiting there.

"Such a sight as I saw when I got there," he exclaimed as we crowded into the car and sped uptown. "There, in his big desk chair sat Neumeyer, absolutely rigid, the most horribly contorted look on his face that I have ever seen—half of pain, half of fear.

"Before him lay a book of beautiful colored plates of inscriptions published by the National Museum of Mexico City. He had evidently been studying them.

"Well, I walked over and bent down to touch him. His hand was cold, of course. As nearly as I could make out, he must have been dead six or eight hours at least, perhaps longer."

Sinclair had been listening intently but had said nothing. He was impatient of every delay, but at last we reached Neumeyer's.

The Professor had occupied a back room and an extension on the first floor of a private house which he rented, using the extension as a study and miniature museum of his own.

We entered the little private museum which all night had guarded its terrible secret. The very atmosphere of tragedy in it sent a shudder over me, and Sinclair was nervous and shaken.

Kennedy began at once by examining the body which had been moved by the Coroner from the chair and was lying, covered up, on a couch.

In the fleshy part of the back of the neck, just below the left ear, was a round, red mark, with just a drop of now coagulated blood in the center.

As I caught sight of it, I could not help exclaiming involuntarily—

"Just the same as that on Madame Valcour!"

Kennedy said nothing, but squeezed out from the little wound on Neumeyer's neck a few drops of liquid on another little glass microscope slide from the emergency-case in his pocket.

"You say most of his work had been carried on in Mitla?" asked Kennedy, looking about at the crowded room.

"Not all of it," replied Sinclair. "A year ago he was in Yucatan. But this year he had been in Mitla, until the rebels made it dangerous. After that he spent some time at the pyramids near Mexico City, but even that became dangerous and he came back here. But it was Mitla that he was most interested in."

"You were familiar with what he had here, I presume?" went on Kennedy.

"Very," answered Sinclair.

"Then I wish that you would look through the room and see if there is anything missing. I am going outside in the back yard under the windows to look about."

Sinclair began carefully running over the stuff.

In the yard Kennedy first looked about to get the general bearings of the house. It was several houses in from the corner, but comparatively easy to reach over the back-fences from the side street.

Under the window of the extension, which had been back of and a little to one side of Neumeyer's chair, was a clump of bushes, and as Kennedy approached, in order to see whether it would be possible to climb up to the window, he pushed aside the fronds of leaves.

Suddenly he bent down, I thought at first to look for footprints. Instead, he picked up a short cylinder, an inch or so long and a little more than half an inch in diameter. It was on what looked to me like a thin reed stick three or four inches long, and the cylinder itself was of a light buff-brown.

Who had dropped it, I wondered?

He gave a glance upward which assured him that it was entirely possible for any one of somewhat more than ordinary agility to reach the window-sill by a leap and then pull himself up to it. Then he released the bushes and rejoined me.

"What is it?" I asked.

Kennedy was looking at the little reed stick, on the end of which was the small buff-brown cylinder. He turned it over and over, noticing a place where a minute fragment had evidently been broken off.

Finally he dug his nail into it. The mass was comparatively soft. As he rubbed his nail gingerly over the tip of his tongue, he puckered his face and quickly rubbed his tongue vigorously with his handkerchief, as if the taste had been extremely acrid.

"Even that little speck that adhered to my nail," he observed, "makes my tongue tingle and feel numb yet."

He turned without a word further and reentered the house, mounting the steps to the quarters occupied by Neumeyer.

"Have you discovered anything yet?" he asked of Sinclair who was still busily engaged going over the archeologist's treasures.

"I can't say," answered Sinclair slowly. "There was an inscription over which Neumeyer and I had puzzled a great deal—on a small block of porphyry. I don't see it."

"It came from Mitla?" asked Kennedy casually.

"Yes," replied Sinclair, still rummaging in the mass of stuff.

Mitla, as I already knew, was south of the city of Oaxaca, in the state of that name; and there, I recalled, were situated the properties and the railroad interests of Sinclair, in which Mrs. Hawley had told us she too was interested.

In the ruined palaces of Mitla was the crowning achievement of the old Zapotec kings. In fact, no ruins in America, I had heard, were more elaborately ornamented or richer in material for the archeologist.

As Kennedy himself looked about, we could see that Neumeyer had brought up porphyry blocks on which was much hieroglyphic painting, peculiarly well preserved in that dry atmosphere. There were many sculptured stones and mosaics. Here were jugs, there were cups, vases, all sorts of utensils. Many of the articles had a religious significance, and there were little figures of gods and sacrificial stones. In fact there was packed on shelves and into corners of the room enough stuff almost to equip a fair-sized museum.

One thing I noticed now which had not attracted my attention at first in our surprise. It was an idol, a hideous thing, which sat on the desk directly in front of where Neumeyer had been seated. Squatted and coiled about it were frogs and snakes.

I could not help feeling that this terrible image was a fitting piece to have accompanied the gruesome occupant of the narrow room during his long vigil. Indeed, the mere sight of it sent a shudder over me. If I had been inclined to the superstitious, I might certainly have been pardoned for believing that it had in some way wreaked its revenge upon the man for having disturbed the resting-places of the private and public deities of this long-dead race. However, not being superstitious, I knew that it must have been something very much alive, though diabolical in its nature, which had really been the cause of the tragedy.

DR. LESLIE reappeared, bringing the caretaker of the house, an old woman.

"Did the Professor have any visitors yesterday?" asked Kennedy as the care-taker paused on the threshold of the now ghastly little room, completely unnerved by the tragedy that had been so close without her apparently knowing it. "Did you see any one about who looked suspicious or hear any noises?"

"In the afternoon," she replied slowly, "a rather pretty, dark woman called and asked for the Professor. She seemed very disappointed when she found that he was out."

"Did she look like a Mexican?" asked Kennedy.

"Well, I can't say, sir. She might have been partly Spanish, but she was different from most of them."

"Did she leave any name?"

"No. But she seemed to be much interested in seeing him. She asked several questions about him and then went away. That was all I saw of her and I didn't see any one else about."

We had evidently got all we could from the old caretaker.

"I hardly place much reliance on what she says," remarked Kennedy when she had gone. "She's too near-sighted. It might have been a Mexican Indian for all we know. That's usually the way. The people who have a chance to help you are so unobservant."

Dr. Leslie showed plainly that he was perplexed.

"I'll tell you, Kennedy," he confessed after a moment, "that's a good deal the way I feel about this case. I'm far from satisfied with the progress that my own assistants are making with that Valcour case, too."

I saw a half smile of satisfaction flit over Craig's face. He had expected it. But the flicker was only momentary and quickly suppressed.

"As far as they can determine," went on the Coroner, "there is absolutely no clue to her death. I thought at first that it must be a poison. But if it is, it must have been one of the most subtle, for apparently every trace of it has vanished."

He shook his head doubtfully.

"I know she could not have been asphyxiated, as I told you at the Vanderveer, for there was no illuminating gas in the room. Yet in some respects she looked as if she had been. I have gone over all the possibilities of suicide and of poisoning, but——"

He shrugged his shoulders and left the remark unfinished.

"In other words, you have no clue yet," supplied Kennedy.

"Well, it might have been heart trouble, I suppose," remarked Dr. Leslie.

"Hardly. She looked strong that way. No—off hand, unless you have discovered something yourself, I shouldn't be inclined to say that it was anything organic."

Leslie gave no evidence of having discovered a thing.

"Then too," he resumed, "they tell me she was intimate with a lot of these refugees from Mexico. I have thought it might be some new kind of tropical disease."

He paused again, then went on sheepishly—

"I must confess that I don't know. The fact is I had my own theory about it until not long ago. That is why I wanted to see you so much after this Neumeyer affair occurred too."

"What do you mean?" asked Craig, evidently bent on testing his own theory by the weakness of that of some one else. "What was your idea?"

"I thought at first," pursued Dr. Leslie, "that we had at last a genuine 'poisoned needle' case. In some respects it looked like it."

"But," objected Kennedy, "clearly this was not a case of white slavery or anything of that nature. No, it impresses me as a case of murder pure and simple. Have you tested for the commonly used poisons?"

Dr. Leslie nodded.

"Yes, and there was no poison," he said, "absolutely none that any of our tests could discover, at least."

A silence of a few moments ensued, in which the coroner was apparently turning something over in his mind, seeking just the way to phrase it. Kennedy said nothing.

"You realize, Kennedy," said the coroner at last, clearing his throat, "that we have no very good laboratory facilities of our own to carry out the necessary investigations in cases of homicide and suicide. We are often forced to resort to private laboratories. Now, sir—if we might—appeal to you?"

"I should be only too glad to assist you, Doctor," answered Kennedy quickly.

"Thank you," responded Dr. Leslie, evidently much relieved, for he had been thinking of the time when a few days hence the newspapers might be criticizing his office for not having obtained results.

He gave some orders regarding the disposition of the body of Neumeyer, and we left the house together with Sinclair who had fallen into a brown study.

"I shall send the necessary materials to your laboratory," concluded the coroner as we parted.

"Fine," agreed Kennedy.

Sinclair seemed to have nothing that he could add to what had already been discovered and we left him, after finding out at what hotel he usually stopped. Burke too excused himself, saying that he had a few matters that he wanted to run down personally.

"Why should any one want to steal old tablets of Mixtec inscriptions?" I asked thoughtfully of Kennedy as we left the others. "As nearly as I can make out, that is about the only motive that any one has even suggested for the murder of Neumeyer. Surely they couldn't have a sufficient value, even on appreciative Fifth Avenue, to warrant murder."

"As far as that goes," replied Kennedy sententiously, "it *is* incomprehensible. Yet we know that people do steal such things. The psychologists tell us that they have a veritable mania for possessing certain curios. However, it may be possible that there is some deeper significance in this case," he added, his face wrinkled in thought. "For instance, there was that letter Neumeyer wrote to Sinclair. He might have discovered something that really had a practical value."

It was, to me, a new aspect of the affair that an archeologist might possess something that appealed to the cupidity of a criminal.

"Then too," went on Craig, "there is the problem of who this mysterious woman-caller may have been. I thought it might be Ruiz—but I doubt it. At present I'm inclined to believe that it was some one whom we haven't yet connected with the case. At any rate, I think tonight I'll see what sort of welcome we may get at the cabaret. Are you game?"

"Go as far as you like," I replied.

I was now thoroughly aroused to solve the riddle. The further we went the more incomprehensible it seemed. How and by whom the beautiful Madame Valcour and now Professor Neumeyer had met their deaths seemed to me to remain as great a mystery as ever.

CHAPTER VI

THE MESCAL PARTY

OUR second visit, that night, to the Mexican cabaret was more cordial than the first. As yet none of them suspected anything, and it seemed that we had made a good impression before and now found that we had established ourselves on a footing at least of intimacy.

Thus it came about that we had no difficulty in being seated at the table where we knew was to be the party which later would adjourn to a private dining-room upstairs. We even felt emboldened to do a little visiting on our own account from table to table, praising Señora Ruiz for her dancing, exchanging light banter with Mrs. Hawley, and even chatting for a few moments with Sanchez who, however, seemed to be morose and moody.

It was not difficult to imagine the cause, and even if it had been, Mrs. Hawley would have supplied the reason.

Sanchez sat silent for the most part, and once Mrs. Hawley leaned over and remarked—

"He has been like that ever since he learned of the death of Valcour."

Señora Ruiz danced with a fire which surpassed even that of the night before, but it had no effect on Sanchez. He seemed to be engrossed in something else, far away. Ruiz was careful not to intrude on his thoughts, but I fancied that there was a sort of elation in his face. I am sure that Hattie Hawley felt no extraordinary sorrow over the news. The fact was, as nearly as I could make it out, that Valcour had been a trouble-maker for both of them. She had, evidently, had all the men at her beck and call, and the others were not sorry, at least, to have a formidable rival removed, although whenever her name was mentioned there were general expressions of concern and sympathy.

The cabaret was going as if nothing had happened, but one could not help observing that the group of friends were quite sobered by the quick succession of deaths of frequenters of the place. We listened intently to the conversation, but no one, at least openly, claimed to have been intimate with either Valcour or Neumeyer, although the mystery surrounding their deaths could not but have its dampening effect.

I looked about from time to time expecting that Sinclair might drop in, as long as he was in town, but evidently he was avoiding the place.

"Neumeyer must have been a very interesting man," ventured Craig in a lull in the conversation when it had drifted around to the situation outside the capital of Mexico.

"He was," chimed in Mrs. Hawley. "Most of us, though, had more interest in modern Mexico than in the past—except Colonel Sinclair. By the way, I wonder why he isn't here tonight? He is in town."

"Indeed?" remarked Kennedy innocently. "I wish he would drop in. I have heard so much about him lately that I would like to know him better."

Sanchez for the first time seemed to show some interest in the conversation, as he caught the name of Sinclair, but he said nothing.

"I'm just as well satisfied," put in Señora Ruiz with a slight shrug of her pretty shoulders. "I like Colonel Sinclair—but he is all business—business—railroads, mines and mines and railroads. There are other things in life besides business."

I could not help comparing the two women. Hattie Hawley was of the type that admired a man for the very things that did not interest Ruiz. Yet I must say that Ruiz interested me.

As the evening advanced, the life of the cabaret became more and more lively. Everywhere now I could overhear references to the two *causes célèbres* of the day, but they were of a different character, inspired mostly by curiosity, and some of them even morbid.

Ruiz had repeated her dances of the night before with her accustomed success, and after being generously applauded and welcomed by the various groups had disappeared upstairs. One by one several others followed, including Sanchez. Mrs. Hawley, who had been talking to some friends near the door, disappeared up the steps too.

* * *

WE HAD passed a not unenjoyable evening, but we had really learned nothing, and I was about to remark the same to Craig who, I imagined, was scheming how he could get upstairs without exciting suspicion, when our waiter, who by this time felt that he had a sort of proprietorship in us, approached and bent over us.

"They are asking upstairs whether you would care to join them?" he inquired deferentially.

"Delighted," responded Craig with a quick glance at me.

We rose and followed the waiter out of the door. As we mounted the steps and reached the upper hall, I noticed a little sort of office in an alcove, and behind a small desk a dozen or so pigeonholes for letters. Evidently the cabaret conformed to the law, outwardly at least, and had a hotel license.

Down the hall the waiter paused, and as we came up with him threw open a door into a fair-sized dining-room, beautifully furnished. Señora Ruiz received us politely and we were ushered in. Several persons were seated either about the table or in easy chairs.

One, to whom we were introduced as Señor Alvarez, had been playing on the piano as we entered—a curious rhythmic, monotonous melody. There was also a Señorita Guerrero whom we had not met, a soft dark-eyed beauty of a more refined type than Ruiz. Sanchez was there, of course, and Mrs. Hawley.

"Usually we have a large party here," remarked the latter, "after the cabaret closes, for we can stay here as late as we please without interference from the police. But tonight we are rather few, unfortunately."

Kennedy responded with some courtly remark which quite won the smiles of the ladies, for the Latin-American loves those little touches that round off the edges of social intercourse.

"That was a most curious piece of music I heard as we came in," he added. "Might I inquire what it was?"

"It is a song of the Kiowa Indians of New Mexico," responded Señora Ruiz. "Señor Alvarez was with the Federals when they were driven across the border, and one day before he came up to New York I believe he heard it. He has endeavored to set it to music so that it can be played on the piano. That monotonous beat that you hear in it is supposed to represent the tom-toms of the Indians during their mescal rites." She paused, then added, turning to me, as I happened to be nearest, "Will you try a little mescal?"

"Mescal?" I repeated. "Oh yes, to be sure. It's the Mexican brandy, isn't it? I never tasted it or pulque either."

"Oh," she replied quickly, "the mescal that I mean is not that terrible drink. It is quite different—the peyote bean, perhaps you have heard it called. The drink is horrible stuff that sends the peon out of his senses and makes him violent. The mescal that I mean is not only a shrub—it is a—a religion."

"Yes, it is almost that among the Indians," remarked Sanchez who seemed to have regained something of his own manner. "The mescal cult, if you choose to call it that, has spread widely in New Mexico and Arizona among the Indians, and even northward. I understand your Government has forbidden the importation of the plant and its sale to the Indians under severe penalties. Still, the sale grows, they tell me. I don't think it is any worse than some of the whisky they sell—not so bad, for the whisky is beastly. Will you try it?"

On the table now I noticed that there lay some round, brown disk-like buttons, about an inch in diameter and perhaps a quarter of an inch thick. They were exactly like those which Kennedy had found in the chatelaine of Valcour, and it was with the greatest effort that I managed to control my surprise. I watched Kennedy to see what he would do, but his face betrayed nothing.

Señora Ruiz took one of the little buttons out of the tray and carefully pared off the fuzzy tuft of hairs on the top. It looked to me very much like the tip of a peculiar cactus plant, which in fact it was. Then she rolled it up into a little pellet and placed it in her mouth, chewing it slowly.

The others followed her example and we did the same. Mentally I determined to follow Kennedy's lead.

"The mescal shrub," remarked Alvarez as he joined us, "grows precisely like these little buttons which you see here. It is a species of cactus which rises only half an inch or so from the ground. The stem is surrounded by a clump of blunt leaves which give it its button shape. On the top, still, if you look carefully, you can see the tuft of spines, like a cactus."

"That's very interesting," commented Kennedy, examining one.

"It grows in the rocky soil in many places in the northern Mexican states," continued Alvarez, "and the Indians, when they go out to gather it, simply lop off these little ends that peep above the earth. They dry them, keep what they wish for their own use and sell the rest for what to them is a fabulous sum."

"It has to be smuggled across the border," smiled Mrs. Hawley, "but we don't mind that."

I HAD scarcely swallowed the bitter, almost nauseous thing than I began to feel my heart action slowing up and my pulse beating fuller and stronger.

For the moment I was a little bit alarmed, thinking of the tragedies that had so recently taken place, but I reflected that Kennedy would not try anything that was dangerous. Still, I could see the pupils of his eyes dilate, as with a dose of belladonna, and I suppose mine must have done the same.

It was not long before I began to feel a sense of elation, of superiority—as if it were I, not Craig, who was engineering this case. I did nothing to carry my new idea either into word or action, and afterward I learned that that feeling was a common experience of mescal-users, that they sometimes actually did perform wonderful feats while they were under the influence of the drug.

But the feeling of physical energy and intellectual power soon wore off. I was glad to recline in an easy chair in silent indolence.

Then for an enchanted hour followed a display which I am totally unable to describe in language that can convey to another the beauty and splendor of what I saw.

I closed my eyes. By a strange freak of fancy I thought I saw that hideous, grinning idol which had been standing on Neumeyer's desk. All about it played long tongues of red and golden flame. I opened my eyes hastily. The vision was gone.

I picked up a book. It seemed that a pale blue-violet shadow floated across the page, leaving an after-image of pure color that was indescribable. It was a blue such as no worker in art-glass ever produced.

Still seeing that marvelous blue, I replaced the book and again closed my eyes. A confused riot of images and colors, like a kaleidoscope, crowded before me—golden and red and green jewels in a riot of color. I gazed—with closed eyes—and still I could see it. I seemed to bathe my hands in incomparable riches such as I had never dreamed of before.

It was most peculiar. All discomfort ceased. I had no desire to sleep, however. Instead I was supersensitive. And yet it was a real effort to open my eyes, to tear myself away from the fascinating visions of color.

I looked upward at the ceiling. It seemed that the gas jets of the chandelier, as they flickered, sent out waves, expanding and contracting, waves of color. The shadows in the corners, even, were highly colored and constantly changing.

Alvarez began, lightly, to play the transposed Kiowa song, emphasizing the notes that represented the drum beats. Strange to tell, the music itself was actually translated by my brain into pure color!

The rhythmic beating seemed to aid in the transformation. I fell to wondering what the ignorant savages thought, as they sat in groups about their flickering campfires while others of the tribe beat the tom-toms and droned the strange, weird melody. What were the visions of the red man as he chewed his mescal button and the medicine men prayed to the cactus god, Hikori, to grant a "beautiful intoxication"?

At another end of the room was a cluster of light-bulbs which added to the flood of golden effulgence which suffused the room and all things in it. I imagined for an instant that the cluster became the sun itself, and I actually had to turn my head away from it and close my eyes.

Even then, just as if I had been gazing at the sun, the image persisted. Suddenly it changed. I saw the golden sands of a beach blazing with a glory of gold and diamond-dust. I could see the waves of incomparable blue flecked with snowy white foam, rolling up on the sands. A vague perfume was wafted on the air. I was in an orgy of vision. Yet there was no stage of maudlin emotion. It was at least elevating.

Color after color, vision after vision succeeded, but in all there persisted that vision of gold. Whether it was something in the drug or whether it was some thought of gold subconsciously cropping up, it was nevertheless there.

Kennedy's experiences, as he related them to me afterward, were similar. When the playing began, a beautiful panorama unfolded before him—the regular notes of the music enhancing the beauty and changes of the scenes which he described as a most wonderful kinetoscopic display.

As for myself, I longed for the power of a De Quincy, a Bayard Taylor, a Poe, to do justice to the thrilling effects of the drug. I can not tell half, for I defy any one even to dictate, much less recall, more than a fraction of the rapid succession of impressions under its influence. Indeed, in observing its action I almost forgot, for the time, the purpose of the visit, so fascinated was I.

Then suddenly I would see that hideous face of the Mixtec idol when I closed my eyes, would see its slimy frogs and snakes, twisting, squirming. Now it seemed to laugh, to mock, now to menace and threaten.

The music ceased, but not the visions. They merely changed.

Señora Ruiz advanced toward us. The spangles on her filmy net dress seemed to give her a fairy-like appearance. She seemed to float over the carpet, like a glowing fleecy white cloud on a rainbow-tinted sky.

Kennedy, however, had not for a moment forgotten the purpose of our visit which was to get more information. His attention recalled mine and I was surprised to see that when I made the effort I could talk and think, apparently, quite as rationally as ever. Still, the wildest pranks were going on in my mind and vision.

Some one had ordered a liqueur and the waiter was slow in responding. Kennedy rose and volunteered to go downstairs and get some action, and I followed.

AS WE passed down the hall, we came to the little alcove-office, with its letter boxes.

"Evidently the habitués are accustomed to receiving letters here," he remarked, pausing.

We looked about. There was not a soul in sight. Quickly Kennedy stepped over to the letter-box. As he ran his eye over some of the letters, he picked out one postmarked two days before and addressed to Madame Valcour. Kennedy went hastily over the letters in the other compartments, now and then selecting one, and without more ado slipped them into his inside pocket. Then we went downstairs and found the waiter.

When we returned, Alvarez had started the music again and for the moment I yielded to it and became oblivious to all but the riot of color which the peyote bean had induced.

Every time Señora Ruiz moved about, she seemed to be clothed in a halo of light and color. Every fold of her dress radiated the most delicate tones.

Yet there was nothing voluptuous or sensual about it. It seemed to raise one above earthly things. Men and women were now brilliant creatures of whom I was one. It was sensuous, but it was not sensual.

I remember that I looked once at my own clothes. My every-day suit was, I thought, exquisite. My hands were covered by a glow as of red fire that made me feel that they must be the hands of a demi-god at least.

Señora Ruiz was offering some more of the mescal to the others when there floated into my vision another such hand. It laid itself on mine and a voice whispered in my ear—

"Walter, we have had enough. Come, let us go. This is not like any other drug—not even the famous hasheesh. I have found out all I want."

We rose and Kennedy made our excuses amid general regrets.

As we left the cabaret the return to the world was quick. It was like coming out from the theater and seeing the crowds on the street. They, not the play, were unreal for the moment. But strange to say I felt no depression as a result of the mescal intoxication, although for a long time I could not shake off that sense of seeing blue and red and golden.

"What is it that produces such results?" I asked as Kennedy hurried along until we found a night-hawk cab.

"The alkaloids," he answered, directing the cabman to the laboratory, late though it was. "Mescal was first brought to the attention of scientists, I believe, by explorers of our own Bureau of Ethnology. Dr. Weir Mitchell and Dr. Harvey Wiley and several German scientists, as well as Mr. Havelock Ellis, have investigated it since then. It is well known that it contains half a dozen alkaloids and resins of curious and little-known nature and properties."

"You think it was the poison used?" I asked, my mind reverting to the cases of Valcour and Neumeyer.

"Hardly," he replied. "Of course, I haven't had time to investigate that, but I should say the poison in those cases was much more violent, off-hand."

Our cab made excellent time in the deserted streets and we were rapidly being carried uptown to Craig's laboratory at the University.

As the effect of the mescal began to wear off in the cool, fresh night-air, I found myself thinking more clearly, yet in a peculiar, questioning state of mind.

Nothing much had been said. If our new acquaintances had any guilty knowledge they were certainly keeping close-mouthed about it, even when off their guard among themselves.

What had we gained by our visit?

A packet of letters.

CHAPTER VII

THE BURIED TREASURE

LATE as it was, Kennedy insisted on plunging into work in his laboratory. To all appearances the mescal had had no great effect upon him, and indeed I myself felt nothing except a lassitude which I knew I could overcome by an effort of will, if the occasion demanded.

I watched him indolently, however, and as nearly as I could make out he was working over what looked like an X-ray tube, though of a different pattern from any that I had seen before.

"What is that, Craig?" I asked at length, "an X-ray outfit?"

"Yes," he replied scarcely looking up from the apparatus. "These are what are known as 'low' tubes. They give out the so-called 'soft' rays."

He did not seem disposed to interrupt his work to talk and I kept silent, wondering why he was working so feverishly.

At last he was ready to go ahead and I was glad of it, for the pungent odor of ozone from the electrical discharge was not adding to my physical comfort.

Kennedy had placed the letter that had been addressed to Valcour in the machine, radiographed it, then rapidly laid aside the plate and placed another letter in it, repeating the process. The second letter, I observed, had been addressed to Sanchez and was postmarked Mexico City several days before. Quite eveidently Sanchez and the rest of the party had, in the suppressed excitement of the day and evening, neglected to look in the letter boxes to see whether there was anything for them. It was a fortunate opportunity of which Kennedy was taking advantage, though it aroused my curiosity to know just what he was doing.

I was on the point of breaking my silence and asking when he volunteered the explanation himself.

"The possibility of reading the contents of documents enclosed in a sealed envelope," he explained, "has already been established by the well-known English X-ray expert, Dr. J. F. Hall-Edwards.

"Dr. Edwards has been experimenting with the method of using the Roentgen rays recently perfected by a German scientist. By this new method radiographs of very thin substances, such as a sheet of paper, a leaf, an insect's body, may be obtained. These thin substances through which the rays used formerly to pass without leaving any trace on the sensitized plate can now be radiographed."

He pointed to some examples of the work he had already done on other cases to show what results might be expected when he developed the plates in this. I looked closely. On the negatives it was easily possible to read the words inscribed on the sheet of paper inside the envelope. So admirably defined were all the details that even the gum on the envelope and the very edges of the folded sheets inside the envelope could be distinguished.

"Any letter written with ink having a mineral basis can be radiographed," went on Craig, still working over those which he had abstracted from the cabaret. "Even when the sheet of paper is folded in the usual way it is possible by taking a radiograph stereoscopically, as I am doing, to distinguish the writing. Every detail stands out in relief. Besides, the pictures of the writing can be greatly magnified and, with the help of a mirror where it is backed up, what is written can be accurately read if you are careful."

He had completed his work and it had taken only a few minutes to do it. As he finished he handed me the letters.

"Walter," he said, "while I am going ahead here, I wish you would take that cab back again to the cabaret. Get in there again, if you can—make some excuse about having lost or forgotten something—then watch your chance and restore these letters to their pigeonholes before any one notices that they are gone. You needn't come back. I have just a little more to do here and I'll meet you at the apartment. I think by tomorrow that I shall have something interesting to show you."

I hurried back to the Mexican cabaret and succeeded in getting past the look-out who was posted at the door after the regular closing time by telling him that I had made a mistake and taken the wrong hat when we left. He nodded and I mounted the stairs.

Down the hall I could hear sounds from the private dining-room that told me that the mescal party was still in progress. I did not wait, however, for to be seen again would certainly arouse suspicion. It was the work of only a moment to return the letters, and without being seen by any of the party I reached the street door again and with a smile bade the look-out good night.

Kennedy did not come in until some time after I reached the apartment, and then only because there was nothing else that he could accomplish that night.

HE WAS up early in the morning, looking eagerly at the papers, but there was nothing in them that had any bearing on the cases that interested us.

Kennedy was much excited when I met him later in the morning in the laboratory. He had been endeavoring to decipher the letter that had been written to Valcour.

"It was from Morelos," he cried, showing me the copy as he had pieced it together from the radiogrph.

Evidently it was written hastily the night of the tragedy, before the writer had heard of it. It read:

> I tried to get you tonight, but did not succeed. I hope nothing is wrong. It would be too bad if there should be a slip this time as there was when you had the blue-prints of the Corregidor at Manila, only to lose them on the street in Calcutta. Please let me know as soon as you can what has happened. I dream of you always and of the day when this trouble will be over. I do not dare write more and only this because I do not know whether I can reach you at the hotel or not.

The note was, as Kennedy pointed out, signed "Morelos."

"Burke has just called up," he went on. "Fortunately I was able to read him the letter. He could make nothing of it. But he told me he had been making inquiries, both of the Government and among the newspapers that are best informed on Mexican affairs. Morelos is one of the rebel junta here in New York. They have a headquarters down on South Street, and as soon as we can get a chance I want to go down and look them over. Just at present, though, these letters seem to be the most important thing."

Kennedy shoved over to me the copy, as he had made it out, of another of the letters.

"It is to Sanchez and arrived only today, after being delayed and crossing the ocean twice in order to get past our blockade down in Mexico. I think you will find that sufficiently interesting."

The letter read, being written evidently from Mexico City:

> According to rumors that reach me here in the capital, my friend Señor Alvarez will be in New York probably by the time you receive this. He will undoubtedly call on you and I know that you will treat him with every courtesy. He has been deeply in the confidence of the Government and has traveled all over as a confidential agent. Just before he went to the Northern States, he was in the capital, having completed a tour of the Southern States to ascertain the true state of public sentiment.
>
> It is about that that I wish to write. While down there he passed through Mitla some months ago where he met a Professor Neumeyer. It is rumored that Neumeyer has succeeded in smuggling out of the country a very important stone which bears an inscription. I do not know, but depend on you to look into the matter and to let me know whether there is anything in it.
>
> According to the story, Neumeyer took advantage of the disturbed situation down in Oaxaca. Of course, as you know, the inscription, if there is one, is really the possession of the Government.
>
> You will find that Señor Alvarez, in addition to being a man of affairs, is a learned antiquarian and scholar. Like many others down here now, he has a high regard for the Japanese. As you know, there exists a natural sympathy between some Mexicans and Japanese, owing to what is believed to be a common origin of our two races. Señor Alvarez has been much interested and, I am told, is engaged in a special study of the subject.
>
> In spite of the assertions of many to the contrary there is little doubt left in the minds of students that the Indian races which have peopled Mexico were of Mongolian stock. Many words in some dialects are easily understood by Chinese immigrants. A secretary of the Japanese Legation here was able recently to decipher old Mixtec inscriptions found in the ruins of Mitla.
>
> Señor Alvarez has been much interested in the relationship and, I understand, is acquainted with a Japanese curio-dealer in New York, named Nichi Moto, who wishes to collaborate with him on a monograph on the subject. If he publishes it, it is expected to have a powerful effect on public opinion both here and in Japan.
>
> In regard to the inscription which Neumeyer has taken with him, I rely on you to keep me informed. I do not know its character, but it may interest either Colonel Sinclair or the Japanese. In either case you can see how important it may be, especially in view of the forthcoming mission of General Francisco to Tokyo.
>
> Very sincerely yours,
> Emilio Nogales, Director.

As I finished reading I turned quickly to Kennedy.

"Some one down at that Mexican cabaret knows more about the death of Neumeyer than appears on the surface," I remarked. "What do you suppose the inscription really was about?"

"Well," considered Kennedy thoughtfully, "Mexico is full of historical treasure. As you might gather from the letter, the Government, to all intents and purposes, says to the scientist, 'Come and dig.' And then when he finds anything, the Government steps in and seizes the finds for its own national museum. The finder never gets a chance to keep his discoveries. It isn't difficult to see that Neumeyer thought that this was the time to smuggle something out of the country."

"Rather a dangerous proceeding, evidently," I remarked, thinking of the tragedy that had overtaken the savant.

"Yes, even now it could not be done without exciting all kinds of rumors and suspicions."

Kennedy read over the letter again.

"What do you suppose the inscription was about?" I asked.

"I can only guess," he answered after a bit. "You recall the remark we overheard Neumeyer make the night we saw him and the letter Colonel Sinclair read us?"

I nodded.

"You have read of the wealth that Cortez found during his conquest of Mexico?" Kennedy went on. "Did it ever occur to you what had become of the gold and silver of the conquistadores?"

"Gone to the melting-pot, centuries ago," I replied.

"Yes," he argued. "But is there none left?"

He paused.

"The Indians believe so. Sinclair believes so. That, in my opinion, accounts in large measure for his interest in archeology of the brand that Neumeyer practised."

"True," I agreed. "Sinclair is above all a practical man."

Kennedy looked at me abstractedly.

"There are persons," he resumed, "who would stop at nothing—not even at the murder of German-American savants—murder of their own colleagues—to get such a secret."

He had risen and was pacing the laboratory, thinking aloud.

"Yes," he resumed, "there is a possible clue in that. Suppose some one had discovered the mysterious place where Montezuma or some of those other old kings obtained their gold, or better yet the place where they hid great quantities of it from the Spanish invaders? That place has never been revealed. I have heard a great deal about it. Some say it is in Guerrero, others in Cuernavaca, but there is no one who really knows."

It was a fascinating thought.

"Then you think Neumeyer may have found the secret?" I asked.

"Possibly," Craig answered. "It may have been gold—not ore, but actual bullion or golden ornaments, vessels, plates, anything—that Neumeyer was seeking to locate."

"Could Sinclair have known the secret, too?" I asked, recalling now the intimacy between the two men, and the ill-concealed anxiety of Sinclair when we were looking over Neumeyer's effects on the day of the murder.

"Quite likely," acquiesced Kennedy. "I have had Burke watching Sinclair himself since he came to New York. I don't know that the Colonel has been quite frank with us on everything."

"Has he found anything?" I asked.

"Not when I called up this morning," replied Kennedy. "Sinclair has seen no one since we left him except Mrs. Hawley."

"Perhaps she had ambitions to learn the secret too," I put in.

"She called on him; he did not call on her," volunteered Kennedy.

"What of Alvarez?" I asked.

"A man of rare ability," remarked Kennedy, "a past master at the art of intrigue. Sanchez is a typical soldier of fortune, but Alvarez has the polish of the man of the world. Burke tells me he is one of the most trusted of the agents of the Federal Government. He has been in New York only a few days. But as far as I can see there isn't much to connect him with the case."

Kennedy had been clearing away his X-ray apparatus and was still revolving the matter of the letters in his mind.

"There may be something more to it than even the stolen plans of Sinclair's machine and this conjecture of buried treasure," he remarked at length, when he had finished. "Alvarez evidently has an eye on international relations. I wonder if we can't get a line on him in that way? We must find that curio-shop of Nichi's."

He had reached for the telephone-book.

"Here it is," he remarked, as he ran his finger down the list of N's. "It's a slender chance, but let us go down and look over the yellow peril."

CHAPTER VIII

THE CURIO-SHOP

ANY one seeking articles of beauty and value will find the antique shops of Fifth and Fourth Avenues and some of the side streets a veritable mine of riches.

We had no trouble in locating Nichi Moto's. It was a small, quaint, dusty rookery, up a flight of steps, in an old row of frame houses which must have been just about paying the owner enough to cover the taxes against the day when the land value would have risen and a sky-scraper would replace them.

A gilt sign swung in front of the shop, and as we entered we noticed that the yard in front, for the houses sat back some distance from the sidewalk, was adorned with little dwarf trees and other Japanese plants.

I could not help being impressed by the peculiarly unimpressive exterior which gave little hint of the wealth of beautiful articles that were housed in the most artistic interior.

Kennedy and I sauntered in, just like any other connoisseurs who had no special object yet were always on the lookout for something that might appeal to their tastes.

It was still comparatively early and the shop was as yet deserted, but the polite and smiling Nichi advanced to meet us with a ready bow and an inquiry as to what was our honorable pleasure.

"Oh, we are just looking about," explained Kennedy, "picking up a few things here and there for a den."

"You are welcome," Nichi invited, showing back of the inevitable smile a row of perfect, pearly teeth and a keen eye. "You could not have come to a better or more reasonable place. You will find everything just as it is represented."

Kennedy thanked him and commenced browsing around among the objects, about which indeed one did not have to exaggerate in order to praise.

There seemed to be everything imaginable in the shop. Beautiful cloisonné enamel, articles in mother-of-pearl, lacquer, and champlevé enamel crowded splendid little koros, or incense-burners, vases, tea-pots.

One could feast his eye on enamels, incrusted, translucent and painted. Some were the work of the famous Namakawa of Kioto, others of Namakawa of Tokyo. Satsuma vases, splendid and rare examples of the potter's art, crowded gorgeously embroidered screens with the sacred Fujiyama rising in the stately distance.

"Is there nothing in particular I can show you?" reiterated Nichi, eager to talk about his wares.

"N-no," hesitated Kennedy, "at least not yet, thank you."

As we walked about slowly examining the articles, Nichi busied himself about the shop, always alert to answer a possible question and clinch a possible sale.

Now and then I glanced at him covertly out of the corner of my eye, so as not to let him catch me scrutinizing him. He was a small, wiry chap, like many of his race, with an impassive, expressionless face and beady, watchful eyes.

The more I looked, however, the less I felt that I knew or could know about him. I can not say whether it was the very blankness of his features that impressed me, or whether there was something there which we of the West could never fathom.

KENNEDY and I had gradually worked our way toward the back of the shop when I heard Craig remark as if in surprise—

"Why, Walter, look at these perfectly stunning Mexican curios over here in this corner."

I followed his gaze and found that, sure enough, set apart from the other things, was indeed a very passable collection of Mexican objects of art.

There were objects there that told of both the ancient and modern in the wonderland to the south of us. Little figures of clay depicting all phases of the life of the people, made in Guadalajara, basket-work, and beadwork were interspersed with antiquities, a few idols, ornaments, jewels and utensils of the Aztecs, Toltecs and Mixtecs.

The attentive Nichi was hovering close behind us.

"I have heard that you are interested in Mexican art, too," ventured Kennedy, turning to him.

"Indeed? Who has told you?" inquired Nichi deferentially, but with well concealed curiosity.

"I have many friends from Mexico," hastened to explain Craig. "Some of them meet down at the Mexican cabaret. I suppose you are acquainted with the place? I have heard your name mentioned by them now and then, and I determined if I was ever in this neighborhood with a few minutes to spare to drop in and make the acquaintance of one whom they valued so highly."

"I am delighted, I assure you, to make your acquaintance," responded Nichi, "and I hope you will thank my kind friends down there. Who is it that you know?" he asked, not committing himself.

"I can't say just who it was that I heard mention your place," replied Kennedy guardedly, "but I know several of them—Señora Ruiz, Señor Sanchez, Mrs. Hawley—oh—and of course Señor Alvarez who has just come to New York."

"Yes," responded Nichi, "I have been in Mexico and the art is—what is it you call it—a hobby—with me."

"Señor Alvarez seems to be exceptionally well-informed on the antiquities," continued Kennedy.

"Yes," agreed Nichi colorlessly. "I intended to expand my business and deal in Mexican articles, too. This was the beginning. But," he added with a shrug of his shoulders and a deprecating smile, "this unpleasant affair with your country came along and—well—I scarcely think Mexican things will be popular for some time, unfortunately."

"A remarkable man, Señor Alvarez," persisted Kennedy, seeking to draw Nichi on. "A diplomatist and a scholar, at once."

"There is much culture in Mexico which you Americans do not know," ventured Nichi, adroitly changing the subject.

He was inscrutable to me. Kennedy gave up for the moment the attempt to lead the conversation lest he might arouse suspicion. Evidently he considered that Nichi's welcome was too good to spoil by forcing it.

We turned again to the Japanese objects, as perhaps less risky for the present. As we wandered toward the other corner of the back of the shop, Kennedy noticed, behind some bronzes of the Japanese Hercules destroying the demons and representations of other mythical heroes of the race, a large alcove or tokonoma.

Nichi was evidently very proud of it, for he was at pains to point out to us the panels decorated with peacocks, storks and cranes. It seemed to have an exotic atmosphere, and the carvings and lacquer about it added to the illusion. On one side, also, was a miniature representation of a chrysanthemum garden.

Carved *hinoki* wood framed the panels and the roof of the artistic bower was supported by columns in the old Japanese style. In fact the whole seemed to be a compromise between the very simple and austere and the polychromatic. The dark woods, the lanterns, and the floor tiles of dark red, the cushions of rich yellow and gold, all were most alluring.

Kennedy sat down with an exclamation of approval.

"This has the genuine air of the Orient," he approved.

Nichi was flattered.

"Will the gentlemen drink a little *saki?*" he asked deferentially.

We thanked him, and Nichi, with a glance around that took in the front door and showed no other customers, went to a stairway in the rear and called down to what must have been a basement, "Otaka!"

Evidently those were the living-quarters of the curio-dealers, for a moment later a peculiar looking, almost white attendant appeared and Nichi spoke a few words to him in their own language.

Forthwith Otaka disappeared and promptly produced four glasses and some rice-brandy on a tray with some little cakes. The brandy was poured out and Kennedy pledged our better acquaintance.

It was delightfully foreign to New York to sit in such a bower and I felt almost as if we should soon see a dancing geisha-girl or something that would complete the feeling one had of being transported suddenly across the Pacific. The sounds of street traffic and the distant rumble of an elevated railroad through an open window destroyed the feeling, however.

Nevertheless, there was plenty to think about. There, for instance, was Otaka, taking his own *saki*, quietly, apart from us.

I could not help watching him drink, for it was done so strangely. First he took the cup, then a long piece of carved wood which he dipped into the saki. He shook a few drops on the floor, to the four quarters, then with a deft sweep of the stick lifted his heavy mustache by means of the piece of wood and drained off the *saki* at a draft.

Those peculiar actions attracted my attention to him, and I saw that Kennedy, although carrying on a conversation with Nichi, now and then stole a glance in that direction.

OTAKA was a peculiar man, of middle height, with a shock of dark, tough, woolly hair, well-formed and not at all bad looking. He had a rather more robust general physique and I could not help comparing him to Nichi and thinking perhaps he was a meat-eater and not wholly confined to the regular Japanese diet.

His forehead, too, I noticed, was narrow and sloped backward, the cheek-bones prominent, the nose hooked, broad and wide, with strong nostrils. His mouth was large, with thick lips and a not very prominent chin; his eyes dark gray and almost like those of a European.

"They are very much excited down at the cabaret," I overheard Kennedy remark. "I suppose you have read in the papers of the deaths of Madame Valcour and Professor Neumeyer? They used to come around often, and we met them there."

Nichi seemed to have unbent a little, an effect which was due perhaps to the sociability of the *saki*. Still, he was not to be caught off his guard and Kennedy did not try to press the questioning.

"Yes," he assented, "I read the American papers and have read of it. It is not a wonder that they are excited. Who would not be in their places?"

"I can make nothing of it from the papers," remarked Kennedy very truly, for the papers were floundering about even more hopelessly than Dr. Leslie had been when he appealed to Craig.

"Otaka, take away the empty cups," ordered Nichi, and the attendant hastened to carry out the order.

I knew that Kennedy was longing to ask whether Alvarez had been around to call on him, but at each attempt to ask naturally Nichi seemed to be able to change the subject. I could not help feeling an admiration for the skill of the little curio-dealer in keeping us to the open and avowed purpose of our visit to his shop, and, though he did not betray it, I knew how chagrined Kennedy must be at every baffling turn.

We rose to continue our inspection of the place. There were ivories of all descriptions. Here was a two-handed sword of the Samurai, with a very large ivory handle, a quaint scabbard and a wonderful steel blade.

Kennedy seemed keenly interested in the collection of warlike implements on this side of the shop. He reached over and picked up a bow. It was short and very strong. He held it horizontally, as if for shooting, and twanged the string.

Then he examined with interest an arrow, about twenty inches long, and thick—made of cane with a point of metal very crudely fastened to it. He fingered the deep blood groove in the scoop-like head of the arrow and looked intently at a reddish brown incrustation on it.

Nichi was watching him keenly, too.

"I thought the Japanese law prohibited that?" remarked Kennedy, balancing the arrow.

"It does," hastened Nichi. "Such arrows are rapidly growing extinct. I see you are well acquainted with things Japanese. That is what makes it valuable."

Kennedy considered the arrow and bow critically, holding them up together to get the effect, as if they were hung on a wall.

"It is a bargain," replied Nichi, as Craig inquired the price.

"I'll take it," agreed Kennedy, laying it down as if he were not quite satisfied and wanted to buy something more expensive but had not the money. "It will be just the thing for my den. I like things that are odd and different from what others buy."

"Where shall I send it?" inquired Nichi.

"Oh, never mind sending it," said Kennedy. "It is light and I am going directly home. I can carry it just as well."

We spent five or ten minutes more looking about and then, as some other customers appeared in the doorway, we bowed ourselves out, promising to come when again Nichi received a new consignment which he had been expecting from the Orient.

We walked away, Kennedy carrying his purchase carefully under his arm.

"That other Jap was a strange chap," I observed.

"He wasn't a Jap," corrected Kennedy. "He was an Aino, one of the aborigines who have been driven by the Japs northward, into the island of Yezo."

I had heard of the race, but only knew of them indistinctly.

"They are not Japs, then?" I asked.

"No. Most ethnologists, I believe, think of them as a white race, nearer akin to Europeans than to the Asiatics. The Japanese have pushed them northward and now they are trying to civilize them."

"Otaka looked comparatively civilized for an aborigine," I ventured, "except for that peculiar ceremony with the *saki*."

"Perhaps. But on their native heath they are a dirty, hairy race. Evidently when they are brought under civilizing influences they adapt themselves to the new environment. They say they make very good servants. Still, they are really of the lowest type of humanity—of the very dregs!"

"Are they dangerous?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "I have been told that they are a most inoffensive and peaceable people, good-natured and amenable to authority. But they become dangerous when they are driven to despair by cruel treatment, which probably accounts for some of the notions that exist about their barbarity. The Japanese Government has lately become very considerate of them—though I don't believe all Japanese are. Still, they say the Japs like the Aino women for wives."

We took a surface car uptown again to the laboratory where, sticking in the letter-slot of the door, we found a message from Burke. It read:

I have a line on our friend downtown. Meet me at eight in Bowling Green.

"Morelos!" interpreted Kennedy immediately.

"Walter, there is no use of your wasting time the rest of the day. I have a lot of things to do here in the laboratory. I see Dr. Leslie has sent up the materials he promised, too. Incidentally drop in and see McBride at the Vanderveer. Don't tell him too much, but just let him know that we are making progress.

"Don't forget—eight o'clock—Bowling Green," he concluded, his coat off already, plunging into the investigations he had planned in his workshop of scientific crime.

CHAPTER IX

THE GUN-RUNNERS

TO ONE who knows South Street as merely a river-front street, whose glory of other days has long since departed, where an antiquated horse-car now ambles slowly uptown and trucks and carts are all day long in a perpetual jam, it is peculiarly uninteresting by day and deserted and even vicious-looking by night.

But there is another fascination about South Street that does not appear on the surface to the casual observer, and it was that fascination I saw now.

Perhaps there has never been a serious difficulty in Latin-America which has not, in some way or other, been connected with this street whence hundreds of filibustering expeditions have started. Whenever a dictator is to be overthrown, or half a dozen olive-skinned generals are banished and become eager for a share in the official gold lace again, the arms and ammunition dealers in South Street can give, if they choose, an advance scenario of the whole film—tragedy or comic opera. Real war or opera bouffe, it is all grist for the mills of those close-mouthed individuals.

We met Burke at the subway-entrance, in a state of great excitement.

"What's the news?" asked Kennedy eagerly.

"I've been following up Morelos," replied Burke as he hurried us along down the street. "I've just learned that the Revolutionists are preparing to ship a large amount of arms and ammunition down to Mexico as well as a lot of machinery for the making of money for the rebels. According to the information I have, it is to go on a tramp ship, the *Arroyo*, tonight. The papers are all made out and she is supposed to sail with the tide tonight, carrying a cargo of corn and oats."

"Is Morelos going, too?" asked Craig.

"I think not. But if we can catch them red-handed, the laws against gun-running are pretty severe—a matter of a possible ten years' imprisonment, a fine and forfeiture of the cargo. What I want to do is to scout about and when they begin to move the stuff in trucks, or just before, swoop down on them."

Burke had led the way to a dingy café which we entered. Through a half open door which disclosed a dirty back-room we could catch a glimpse of several men seated about a round table. Only a glance was sufficient to identify them as the typical oily plotters of war.

Morelos, however, who was seated with his back toward us, seemed to be of a different stamp from the others. He was an athletic-looking man, comparatively young, with a well-formed head covered with black hair, crisp and curly, skin the color of a well-smoked meerschaum and a small black mustache which masked a mouth that was cruel even when it was smiling. His eyes were large and brilliant and extraordinarily piercing.

There was an air of suppressed excitement in the back-room of the café, and, having satisfied himself that Morelos was there, Burke quietly motioned to us to follow him out again before we were ourselves observed.

"Where is the ship?" asked Kennedy as we gained the street and followed Burke, keeping as much as possible in the shadow.

"Up the river a few piers," he answered. "Let us look it over and see what they are doing."

It was a foggy and misty night on the water, an ideal night for the gun-runner, and fortunately, such a night as aided us in watching their mysterious preparations.

On the *Arroyo* every one was evidently chafing. Below decks I could imagine that the engineer and his assistants were seeing that the machinery was in perfect order. No doubt men were posted in the streets to give warning of any danger and report the approach of the big lumbering trucks which were to convey the arms from the storehouse, wherever it was, to the ship.

Kennedy strained his eyes to peer through the fog. Out in the river was a tug, watching, to give warning of a possible police-boat. It was dreary waiting, and we drew our coats more closely around us as we shivered in the night-wind and tried to brace ourselves against the unexpected.

"I have notified the police-boat *Patrol* to be ready on the river for the signal," whispered Burke hoarsely, in answer to our questions as to what preparations he had made for the emergency.

THE minutes sped by and lengthened into hours. At last the welcome muffled rumble of heavily laden carts disturbed the midnight silence of the street.

At once a score of men sprang from the hold of the ship, as if by magic. One by one the cases were loaded. The men were working feverishly by the light of battle-lanterns—big lamps with reflectors so placed as to throw the light exactly where it was needed and nowhere else. They were taking aboard the *Arroyo* dozens of coffin-like wooden cases and bags and boxes, smaller and even heavier. Silently and swiftly they toiled.

It was risky work, too, at night and in the tense haste. Once there was a muttered exclamation. A heavy case had dropped. A man had gone down with a broken leg. It was a common thing with the gun-runners. They expected it. The victim of such an accident could not be sent to a hospital ashore. He was carried, as gently as the rough hands of the men could carry anything, to one side where he lay silently waiting for the ship's surgeon who had been engaged for just such an emergency. There was no whimper.

Scarcely a fraction of a minute had been lost. The last cases in this load had been taken aboard, and the tug was crawling up to make fast and tow the ship out into the stream the moment the next consignment arrived and was loaded. Already the trucks were vanishing, empty, one by one, in the misty darkness, as muffled as they came, going back for the last load.

"Come," cried Burke, springing out of the shadow of the warehouse where we had been crouching. "We shall catch them at both ends—on the ship and at their storehouse."

He had leaped up on a pile of timber alongside the dock and was blowing shrilly on his police-whistle.

SUDDENLY lights flashed through the fog on the river. There was the *Patrol* shooting out from a bank of fog that swirled around a slip several piers away and ranging up alongside of the *Arroyo* before it had a chance to make a getaway.

All was excitement, shouts, muttered imprecations

"—— them—they've put one across on us!" shouted some one on the ship.

"We can leave them to the police," cried Burke, hurrying us now along the street in the direction of the trucks, going for their second load. "I want Morelos."

It had all happened so suddenly that the gun-runners had no chance to cover up their retreat. As we ran down the street we could see the trucks standing before a building on the block above the dingy café in which we had first seen the plotters.

Without pausing, Kennedy and Burke dashed up to the door, while from the direction of the ferry we could hear a couple of policemen hurrying toward us. We entered unopposed. The conspirators had taken to their heels at the first sounds of Burke's whistle and the blasts of the police-boat.

IT WAS a ramshackle building to which we came, reminiscent of the days when the street bristled with bowsprits of ships from all over the world, an age when no subsidy or free tolls were necessary for the American merchantmen who flew our flag on the uttermost of the seven seas.

On the ground-floor was an apparently innocent junk-dealer's shop, in reality the meeting-place of those whom we had been seeking. By an outside stairway the lofts above were reached, hiding their secrets behind windows opaque with decades of dust.

It was really a perfect arsenal and magazine into which we entered. The long room was dusty and cobwebbed, crammed with stands of arms, tents, uniforms in bales, batteries of Maxims and mountain-guns and all the paraphernalia for carrying on twentieth century guerrilla warfare.

As we reached the top of the steps, Burke ground out an oath. The loft was deserted. A moment later he had sprung down the steps again, and, joined by the policemen who had answered his call, made a dash into the café in the back room of which we had seen Morelos.

Kennedy, however, did not follow, for in the light of a dim oil-lamp he had seen that this was the real secret meeting-place of the Revolutionist junta. It was a chance not to be missed and he lost no time in rummaging through the warlike paraphernalia in search of anything that might lend a clue to the cases which had brought us into this strange adventure.

Far in the rear of the loft, underneath some old and dirty tarpaulins, he at last unearthed a letter-file and carried it closer to the light.

"This will interest Burke," he exclaimed, as he ran over hastily a number of letters and bills which showed how the Junta had been carrying on its contraband traffic in arms in violation of the embargo that had been established both across the border and at the gulf-ports of Mexico.

"Hulloa—what's this?"

He had drawn out from the file several letters in a dainty foreign hand on the embossed notepaper of the Vanderveer. They were addressed to Morelos. One, evidently the latest, began:

> My dear Ramon: We have succeeded! The plans of the gyroscope air-ship have been stolen from Sinclair and today they will be given to me for safekeeping until I can get out of New York with them quietly and without exciting suspicion. That is the story I gave them. Now, Ramon, it is for you to plan how we are to manage to take them ourselves. It must be done soon, for they may change their plans and demand them back from me at any time. So far they have the utmost faith, however. Let me hear from you at the earliest moment how we are to get them out of the country and hand them safely over to the Revolutionists. With a million kisses from your devoted—Valcour.

"Valcour!" I repeated mystified.

"Yes," exclaimed Kennedy. "Don't you see it all now? The beautiful little Frenchwoman was a Constitutionalist spy working among the Federals. It was her plan to steal that invention of Sinclair's from them and hand it over to her lover Morelos."

"And they discovered the plot," I added hastily.

"Not so fast, Walter," cautioned Kennedy.

"Then you think Morelos got it after all—and sacrificed his lover?" I asked, recalling that cruel mouth under the black mustache.

"I think nothing—yet," he answered, tucking the letter-file under his arm. "Let us find Burke."

"Confound the luck!" ejaculated a familiar voice as we stumbled down the poorly lighted stairs from the loft to the street a moment later and ran into the detective. "Morelos slipped through our fingers, somehow. He wasn't on the *Arroyo*—I knew that. I thought we'd get him here or at the café—but he was too old and slippery at the game."

"Perhaps that may prove some compensation," remarked Kennedy, quietly handing over the letter-file. "I have kept out only these notes."

"Whew!" whistled Burke as he read the notes from Valcour. "That puts a new light on the whole affair."

"Without shedding a ray, yet, on the perpetrator," added Kennedy. "Do you realize that we don't even know how she met her death?"

Burke nodded.

"I shall have to leave this end of the affair to you entirely, for the present, Burke," said Kennedy with a glance at the Junta headquarters and a sweep of his hand down the street toward the captured ship. "I shall be at the laboratory early in the morning, if you want me. But I can't see that we can help you down here, now, at all."

IT HAD been a strenuous night, though only partly successful, and I was glad of Kennedy's decision to get at least a few hours' rest in our apartment after what we had gone through during the past few days.

Kennedy retired when I did, but he could not have slept very long, for, although I was awake early, he had gone already and left a brief scrawl that he would be at the laboratory.

"I wish you'd get Leslie on the wire," he greeted me a few minutes later when I rejoined him, "and ask him to drop in as soon as he can."

I did so and then gazed curiously on his table, littered with chemicals, jars, beakers and test-tubes.

As nearly as I could make out, he had been examining the little buff cylinder on the end of a reed.

I watched him break off a little piece and pour on it a dark liquid from a brown glass bottle. Then he placed it under a powerful microscope.

"Microscopically," he remarked slowly, "it consists almost wholly of minute clear granules which, as you see, give a blue reaction with iodin. They are starch. Mixed with them are some larger starch granules, too, a few plant cells, fibrous matter and other foreign particles—and then there is that acrid, numbing taste, you recall."

He appeared to be in deep thought.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Aconite," he replied, "of which the active principle is the deadly poisonous alkaloid aconitin."

Kennedy had opened a standard work on toxicology and indicated a passage for me to read:

> Pure aconitin is probably the most actively poisonous substance with which we are acquainted, and if administered hypodermically the alkaloid is even more powerfully poisonous than when taken by the mouth.
>
> As in the case of most of the poisonous alkaloids, aconitin does not produce any decidedly characteristic post-mortem appearances. There is no way to distinguish it from other alkaloids, in fact no reliable chemical test. The physiological effects are all that can be relied on.
>
> Owing to the exceedingly toxic nature, the smallness of the dose to produce death and the lack of tests for recognition, aconitin possesses rather more interest in legal medicine than most other poisons. It is one of the few substances which in the present state of toxicology might be criminally administered and leave no positive evidence of the crime. If a small but fatal dose of the poison were to be given, especially if it were administered hypodermically, the chances of its detection in the body after death would be almost nil.

I had scarcely finished reading when Dr. Leslie entered.

"Have you discovered anything yet?" he asked anxiously.

"I am convinced that the murders have been committed by the use of aconite," replied Kennedy slowly.

Dr. Leslie looked at him keenly a moment.

"Then you'll never be able to prove anything in the laboratory," he remarked.

I glanced at him quickly, as the diabolical nature of what had taken place sank into my mind. Here was a poison that defied detection, a criminal so clever that he might never be brought to justice.

Kennedy, however, appeared unruffled.

"There are more ways of catching a criminal, Leslie," he said quietly, "than are set down in the text-books."

CHAPTER X

THE AIR TERROR

DR. LESLIE had scarcely left us when the door to the laboratory was flung open and Burke dashed in with a telegram which he spread open before Kennedy, adding—

"Can you go?"

It was from Sinclair, who had returned to Westport, and was evidently written in haste and without regard for tolls.

> Come out immediately. Having trouble with machine I was to deliver to Government. Bring Kennedy.

"H-m," mused Kennedy. "I wonder what it is now?"

"Can't say," answered Burke. "The train service is rotten in the middle of the day, though. We can't get anything until noon. Can you go?"

"I shall have to go, I imagine," replied Craig, deliberately cleaning up his laboratory-table.

I folded up the message and handed it back to Burke.

"How about the mechanicians he employs?" I asked, voicing a thought which I had had before, but had not expressed.

"There's only one," answered Burke. "I've watched him, and I'm convinced that he's as honest as gold. That was why I said nothing about him when we were out there before. No, this Sinclair affair was an outside job, all right, though what could have happened now is more than I can guess."

"Is there anything more about Morelos?" asked Kennedy.

"Nothing yet. We landed the goods and a lot of the men last night, after you left, but so far no Morelos. By the way, before I got that message from Sinclair I thought I'd nose around that Mexican cabaret. The waiter up there tells me it is pretty deserted. That's another reason why I am anxious to go to Westport. It's barely possible that some of your friends, Ruiz and the rest, may be out there."

Kennedy had finished his clean-up and together we left the laboratory, much to Burke's relief, and made our way to the station.

We were all in a state of impatience by the time we reached Westport, and fortunately Sinclair had taken care of expediting matters by having his car meet us at the depot. The quick spin through the country restored our equanimity and by the time we reached Sinclair's we were ready to plunge into work again.

"What's the matter?" asked Craig as we pulled up and the inventor came rapidly across the lawn to meet us.

"Matter enough," he returned. "Everything seems to be going wrong, and I'm hanged if I can see any reason for it. Just as if I didn't have troubles enough already, the aeroplane won't work properly. Let me show you what I mean."

He led the way over to the hangar where on a runway or slide rested the air-ship.

"I have been all over the thing," he explained. "There isn't a part of the machine

I haven't gone over. I can't seem to find anything wrong—and yet—it doesn't work right."

Sinclair finished the examination of the machine which he had been engaged in when we arrived, then led the way to the little kiosk from which he controlled it.

"Now—just a moment—I'll show you what I mean," he said as he tested out his apparatus for wireless control.

The engine of the aeroplane had already been started. He depressed the right key. She rose and sailed away gracefully. So far, I could see nothing wrong.

"It's all right at the start," he remarked, peering out anxiously at the machine. "It's only after it has flown a while that things begin to go wrong."

Sinclair was depressing lever after lever and the machine was obeying his will as accurately as if he himself had been sitting in it at the wheel.

Suddenly, I could see that something was wrong. The look on his face changed.

"There it is," he cried, rising excitedly.

"What?" asked Burke, gazing at the machine. "Everything looks all right to me."

"Everything looks all right," Sinclair repeated. "Yes indeed—it looks fine to me—when I depress the key to make a turn to the right and the machine deliberately rises and not content with that volplanes down almost to the water. Yes—it may look all right, but it is not all right."

"I didn't know," apologized Burke. "I thought you did it."

"Not a bit of it. I might just as well have no control over it at all now. It's a wonder to me how I ever got the thing back here the last time. Only a lucky chance, I guess."

I don't think I ever felt more sorry for any one in my life than I did for Sinclair just then. Here was the work of years, the child of his brain, as it were, going wrong. I glanced at his tense face; it was tragic.

He ran over the keys.

"Even the signals she repeats back are wrong," he added in despair. "The thing is absolutely out of my control."

The air-ship was mounting higher and higher.

She swerved, her nose pointed toward a spit of sand down at the harbor's mouth.

Before any of us could speak there came a sudden swoop of the machine. Down, down, down she dropped rapidly.

Sinclair was vainly endeavoring to manipulate the keys that ought to have controlled her. But it was no use. Down she planed, gathering momentum.

"Confound it!" he muttered, turning to Kennedy in despair. "What *can* be the matter? You saw her work the other day."

Kennedy was looking from the machine to a wireless detector in the kiosk.

We had all sprung to our feet.

The gyroscope-aeroplane had swooped down to the sand-spit and in a cloud of sand had buried her nose deeply into the beach.

There she lay, a mile or two distant, a mass of tangled wreckage.

"You can thank heaven for telautomatics, at least," muttered Sinclair blankly. "At any rate, no one was in the machine."

We gazed at each other aghast. There was one great unanswered question in all our minds. Whence had come the impulse that had sent the air-ship to her fate?

"Could it have been the gyroscope?" I asked.

Sinclair did not reply. As for Kennedy, he was still looking at the wireless detector. I knew enough to understand that tremendous impulses of wireless energy had in some way been let loose in the air. Still, Kennedy said nothing.

The sand-spit was on the same side of the bay as oursleves, in fact was the point of land that rounded off the miniature cape on which Sinclair lived between the bay and the Sound.

Already Sinclair, followed by Kennedy and oursleves, had started down toward the wrecked aeroplane.

Scarcely a word was spoken as we went.

IT WAS a pathetic sight to see the graceful mechanical bird lying there in the sand, her wings broken, a mass of scrap.

What it was that had caused the catastrophe none of us knew. Had it been some part of the machine itself that had been tampered with?

Craig was turning over the wreckage carefully. To me it seemed a hopeless quest even to try to read the cause of the disaster in such an apparently hopeless mess. Yet, as Kennedy looked it over, I began to fancy that to him it merely presented new problems for his highly deductive and scientific mind.

"The gyroscope is out of business for

good," he remarked, as he examined the dented and battered aluminum case. "But there doesn't seem to be anything wrong with it except what would naturally happen in such an accident as this."

He continued to examine the machine, aided by Sinclair, more nonplussed than ever.

"The engine is a mass of junk now," continued Kennedy with great interest. "See how the cylinders are bent and twisted. The gasoline-tank is intact but dented out of shape. No, there was no explosion there."

Craig bent down again. There was something at least that interested him.

"Look at this little dynamo that ran the gyroscope," he exclaimed.

"Why," cried Sinclair, looking also, "the wires in it are actually fused together. The insulation has been completely burned off. What do you suppose could have caused that?"

Kennedy shook his head and continued to regard the tangled mass thoughtfully for some time.

Then he turned to Sinclair as we began slowly to retrace our steps to the house and said—

"I wish you'd have that little dynamo preserved."

Sinclair nodded, speechless, scarcely able to realize that his life-work had been so completely destroyed at a time when he was convinced that he had succeeded.

None of us spoke until we neared the workshop again for, indeed, there was nothing that we could say.

Once Kennedy dropped back with Burke and spoke a few words, but it was not about the air-ship, for a moment later he caught up with Sinclair and myself who were plodding along in silence.

"I believe I'll take a run about the harbor this afternoon," he remarked. "I'd like to have a look at the Seaville House."

"You can take my new runabout the *Streamline*," replied Sinclair mechanically.

* * *

THE *Streamline* was a three-stepped boat, as fast as an automobile would have been on land. Sinclair had had her built more for pleasure than for racing, and she was a beautiful craft, managed much like a racing-car.

He drove the boat himself, and it seemed that in his chagrin at the untoward accident of his aeroplane he took pleasure in letting the *Streamline* out just to show what he could do. As she started, the purring drone of her eight cylinders sent her feathering over the water like a skipping stone. She sank back into the upturned waves of her own making, her bow leaping upward, a cloud of spray in her wake, curling out like a waterspout on either side.

Even if we had not had the excitement of the day to key us up it would have been exhilarating to shoot down the bay in this buzzing, throbbing shape of mahogany and brass, with her exhausts sticking out like funnels and booming like a pipe-organ.

"Do you want to stop at the hotel?" asked Sinclair after what seemed could hardly be more than a few seconds.

"No," shouted back Kennedy. "Not yet."

He was seated back of Sinclair, busily engaged with Burke in comparing notes and taking in just how things were situated at Seaville.

"There is the cottage where Ruiz stays," pointed out the detective, indicating a pretty little place on the side of the hill, just above the hotel and cut off from it by a clump of trees which had been cleared in front of the cottage and did not obstruct the splendid view down the harbor.

Kennedy surveyed the cottage through a glass, as Sinclair rounded the turn at the head of the harbor and started back.

He handed the glass to me.

I followed his directions.

Among the first things that had caught his eye was what looked very much like the primitive inverted V aerial of a wireless telegraph on the gabled roof.

"Is there a wireless-station near by?" asked Kennedy, leaning forward to speak to Sinclair.

"Yes," he called back. "There is the Seaville station. You can see it in a moment when we round this bend in the shoreline."

The *Streamline* covered space, it seemed to me, almost as rapidly as one could talk, for it was but a moment when we could see, a few miles distant, facing the Sound, the powerful Seaville station, with its tall steel masts of the latest inverted L type. Beneath we could distinguish a cluster of little houses, including the plant and the living-quarters of the operators.

"A wonderful place," went on Sinclair, "one of the best equipped on the coast."

"Marconi?" asked Craig.

Sinclair nodded.

"I should like to visit it," went on Kennedy.

Sinclair headed the runabout toward the station, and in almost no time we were there.

We left the boat at a float and walked up the dock. Sinclair already was acquainted with those in charge of the station, and it needed only an introduction and a few minutes' chat from Kennedy to place us on a most friendly footing.

A WIRELESS-PLANT is always interesting. There is something fascinating about this power of man to reach out into the air and to snatch down messages from the invisible.

The men at the station, too, had seen the accident to Sinclair's gyrosocope air-ship and were eager to know just what happened. Kennedy and Sinclair managed to satisfy their curiosity without telling too much, however, and Craig gradually worked about to asking some questions of his own as soon as he could do so.

"This is a pretty powerful plant," remarked Kennedy. "I don't suppose you are troubled much by interference?"

"Not usually," replied the operator. "But we have been during the past day or two."

He glanced over his "log book" to refresh his memory.

"It's been pretty bad sometimes," he went on. "At first I thought it might be amateur operators, but it was too powerful for any mere amateur. Sometimes the impulses have been terrific."

Kennedy said nothing. He had taken from his pocket a pencil and was writing on a blank form a message, now and then gazing out on the water as he tried to compress the words without sacrificing the clearness.

"I haven't any time to waste," he remarked, as he finished correcting the message. "Can you get this off right away to the city?"

The operator read it over carefully. It was a message to one of Kennedy's students at the University, directing him to get out some apparatus at the laboratory which Craig described and send it off by the late afternoon train for Westport.

"Burke and I will meet the train, Mr. Sinclair, if you will let us take your car for an hour or so."

"You may take anything," acquiesced Sinclair, "if it will help in clearing up this case."

"Just a moment and I will be ready to go back to the house with you," said Kennedy, as he left us for a further talk with some of the men at the wireless-station.

He was gone much longer than a moment, and when he returned he had several packages which he had succeeded in borrowing from the station on the strength of Sinclair's friendship.

"Now I'm ready," he announced, "and the sooner we can get back the better."

Sinclair let out his engine and we fairly flew over the water homeward.

Kennedy wasted no time on our return, but set to work stringing wires, using a windmill on the Sinclair place for the purpose.

"What are you doing?" asked Sinclair curiously.

"I'm improvising my own wireless," replied Kennedy.

"Let me help you," urged Sinclair.

Kennedy accepted his services, more I think to keep him busy and out of the way than anything else. Burke and I watched in silence, Burke especially impressed, for he had not seen as much of Kennedy as I had and seemed to think his every action savored of some black art of detection.

At last, the wires being strung, Kennedy unwrapped a package which he had brought over from the wireless-station and began testing it and setting it up in the little kiosk.

Some parts, I thought, looked very much like a very sensitive microphone, but there were other parts that reminded me of a phonograph, particularly one that looked like the cylinder record.

"Won't there be any—interference?" I ventured, thinking of what I had heard so often in our talks with wireless-operators.

Kennedy smiled. "No," he said, "for I am only going to listen. I am not going to send—at least not by this means," he added, adjusting his apparatus.

"Wireless apparatus," he continued, "consists, roughly speaking, of three parts. First as to the sending, there is the source of power, sometimes a battery, sometimes a dynamo. Then there is the making and sending of wireless-waves, the key, spark condenser and tuning-coil. Finally there is the receiving-apparatus—head-telephones, antennæ, ground and detector. Just now all that I am planning to use is one side—the receiving."

Kennedy had finished his work, and as for a few minutes he rested he gazed out contemplatively over the beautiful bay which the low-falling sun made more entrancing than ever.

"Is there a searchlight down at Seaville?" he asked, at length, turning to Sinclair, "for if there is not we shall have to get one."

"There is one on the end of the dock of the Westport Yacht Club, about half a mile from the hotel," he answered, pointing out the club with its long dock and float.

"You are a member, I see," noted Kennedy with a glance at the club burgee flying from the *Streamline.*

Sinclair nodded.

"Excellent," exclaimed Kennedy. "While Burke, Jameson and I go down to meet the train, I wish you would take the boat and run over to the club. I want to use the searchlight tonight, and by the time you have that arranged I think we shall be able to meet you there. That will be fine, just far enough from the Seaville House not to arouse suspicion, in case there is some one there who is watching us by this time.

"Come, Burke," he added, rising suddenly as if at last a plan of action had shaped itself in his mind. "We had better be going. There are a lot of things that we must arrange—and I want to fix it so that you can be ready for quick action if anything happens tonight."

CHAPTER XI

THE RADIO-DETECTIVE

KENNEDY, Burke and myself hustled over to the railroad-station and there were met by Kennedy's messenger, carrying the packages he had ordered from his laboratory by the wireless courier of the air. We piled them into the rear of the car and a few moments later were speeding to rejoin Sinclair at the Yacht Club.

The club was a large square building, extending out into the water on made land, from which ran a long, substantial dock at the end of which was a platform with a flag and alongside it a searchlight.

We entered the club and, without going up through the large porch where the "rocking-chair fleet" was anchored, went directly down the dock to Sinclair whom we could see on the platform.

"Did you see Mrs. Hawley as you came through?" inquired Sinclair as we greeted him.

"Why no," replied Kennedy, evidently a little put out, for he had chosen the yacht club because, even though there were bound to be many people there and much gossip, still it was not like the Seaville House.

"Where is she?"

"On the porch, upstairs," answered Sinclair.

Kennedy did not look around, but continued to busy himself on the end of the dock. I wondered whether she might have been sent out by some one up at the hotel to watch.

"I suppose we'll have to speak to her as we go out," added Kennedy, "but let us finish here quietly first."

Craig had set up on the platform a large affair which looked very much like a mortar. I watched without saying anything, dividing my attention between it and the splendid view of the harbor which the end of the dock offorded.

"What is all that—fireworks?" asked Sinclair, smiling.

"It's a light-weight rocket-mortar," replied Kennedy, who impressed Burke into service and was explaining something to him in an undertone. "By the way, Sinclair, did Mrs. Hawley say anything about any of the others being down here?"

"I believe that Sanchez and Señora Ruiz and their Japanese servants are at the cottage," reported Sinclair.

Kennedy had next uncovered a round brass case. It did not seem to me to amount to much, as compared to some of the complicated apparatus which Craig had used. In it was merely a four-sided prism of glass, as if it had been cut off the corner of a huge glass cube.

He handed it to us, saying—

"Look into it."

It surely was about the most curious piece of crystal-gazing I had ever seen. Turn the thing any way I pleased and I could see my face in it, just as in an ordinary mirror.

Craig covered it up and gave it to Burke, who assisted him in carrying some other bulky pieces of apparatus as well as another similar brass case containing a second prism down to the *Streamline.*

It was now getting dark, and just before we were ready to start Kennedy proposed that we all should go up and pay our respects to Mrs. Hawley.

AS IT happened it was the night of a dance at the club, and members and their guests were already assembling. It was a brilliant spectacle, faces that radiated pleasure, gowns that for startling combinations of color would have pleased the Futurists, and music, already tuning up, that set the feet tapping irresistibly.

I shall not pause to describe the scene, for the fascination of the ballroom overlooking the bay, on which now a myriad of lights on the boats twinkled, was absolutely wasted on Craig, and indeed has no part in the story. In front of the club was strung out a long line of cars and at the dock now were several speed-boats of national and international reputation, besides Sinclair's *Streamline*.

Mrs. Hawley was indeed surprised to see us, but as far as I could detect there was no element of suspicion in it.

"They were tired of the city," she added as she repeated what Sinclair had already told us of Ruiz and the rest. "I thought I might as well come down, too, and I have rooms at the Seaville. Some acquaintances there who are members of the club asked me if I wouldn't like to come down here, so here I am."

Kennedy had been watching her keenly. Quite contrary from being disconcerted at meeting us she seemed to be pleased, especially at seeing Sinclair.

"Wasn't it too bad about the air-ship?" she added. "I heard them talking about it up at the hotel and I asked Mr. Sinclair, but he didn't seem to know what caused the accident himself."

"No," replied Kennedy. "It was most unfortunate, whatever it was. By the way, I wonder whether any of your friends intend to be here tonight?"

"I think not," she answered frankly. "You know they are very clannish. They live much to themselves. You can't blame them. They're a good deal like we are down in Mexico, you know, with our own American clubs."

Kennedy had arisen and was looking over the gay crowd, but apparently did not find any faces there that he recognized. We chatted a few moments more, then excused ourselves and went down the dock to the boat.

"Either she doesn't know anything or she is a mighty good actress," I commented, falling in with Craig.

"Whatever she knows or doesn't know," he answered, "there is one thing I am sure of. That woman may be depended on to do nothing that would hurt Sinclair. Did you notice? She scarcely took her eyes off him."

"And Sinclair?" I whispered.

"I'm not so sure how much he cares for her," returned Craig.

WE HAD reached the end of the dock, and Sinclair's presence forbade pursuing the subject further. It was only a matter of a few seconds and the engine was started. Kennedy had been talking earnestly with Burke and was the last to jump into the boat.

"Isn't Burke coming along?" asked Sinclair.

"No," replied Craig. "There are several things here that I want him to do, and in the meantime we must get back to your house."

We left Burke standing on the end of the float and made a quick trip down the bay to Sinclair's.

As we walked up the flight of steps that surmounted the terrace, Kennedy asked—

"I suppose you have a phonograph here?"

"Yes," answered Sinclair somewhat mystified, for he at least was in no mood for entertainment.

"Unless I'm mistaken," remarked Kennedy, "I think I shall find something here that will keep us busy for at least a part of the evening and take our minds off our troubles a little bit."

He had diverged off toward the kiosk and the wireless-apparatus which he had rigged up during the afternoon. Loosening the wires, he carried the apparatus bodily with him into the house where Sinclair had the phonograph in his splendidly equipped library.

"This is what I might call my radio-detective," explained Kennedy with just a trace of pride in his voice, as we entered. "Even if it is mainly improvised, I think it is built up on a very compact system and ought to prove efficient."

He had taken the thing apart and from it abstracted the cylinder which I had observed. Brushing it off, he slipped it on the phonograph like an ordinary record.

"Everybody knows, I suppose," he said, pausing and turning to us, "that messages by wireless may be received from any number of stations by using an aerial pole and other apparatus properly.

"Laws, rules and regulations have been adopted to cut off interlopers and stop busybody ears. But, as a matter of fact, nearly everything that is transmitted by the Hertzian waves can be snatched down from the very sky by other wireless-apparatus.

"An operator, his ear-phone clamped to his head, may drink in news conveyed surely and swiftly to him through wireless-signals, plucking from the air secrets of war and," he added significantly—"love."

Kennedy paused a moment over the word, whether to catch some reaction from Sinclair or not I could not make out.

"In other words," he continued, dropping back suddenly into his usual scientific manner, "such apparatus might be used for eavesdropping by a wireless wire-tapper, and I concluded that if there was any of that sort of thing that could be done I would do it. Let me see what result I have from this radio detective-work."

As he adjusted the cylinder, he explained: "You see now why I wanted to visit the wireless-station, for I am using Marconi's new radiotelephone. In connection with his receivers, Marconi uses phonographic recorders and on them has captured wireless telegraph-signals sent out over hundreds of miles.

"That is to say, he has found it possible to receive wireless-signals, although ordinary records are not loud enough. He uses a small microphone on the repeating diaphragm and connected with a loud-speaking telephone. At first there was trouble getting a microphone that would carry a sufficient current without burning up. There were other difficulties, too, but all have been overcome, and with this apparatus which I have here it is possible now automatically to record wireless-messages and actually make them audible."

The very idea of the thing, capturing the noiseless impulses in the air and repeating them so that our finite ears might hear them, seemed incredible.

Kennedy started the phonograph and from it we could hear a succession of ticks.

He translated it rapidly, but it did not seem to be of any interest to us, being simply a message from some one at the Seaville House to a friend on one of the Sound steamers as it passed Westport. Still, although it did not satisfy our curiosity, it was wonderful enough. More than ever, it seemed that he was doing the impossible, for before us buzzing and ticking forth, were message after message which his radio-detective had actually dragged down by magic out of the clouds.

Kennedy would try a message, find that it had no interest for us, then move the needle ahead to pick out the next.

Suddenly he stopped, started the phonograph again at the beginning of a series of ticks and cried—

"Listen!"

I was unable to read the ticking myself but, realizing that it must be something of importance, I bent over Kennedy as, with Sinclair, he set down what the radio-detective had caught.

As nearly as I could make out what he had written, it was:

&EHRANSTHWIAOTYLTEIDXYNG
NNSDTEWDOYANRECHSTAEWNERI
BCESTESRESTEYSOLECOMUETNRO
LDOYEBNHYNUTGOMEMOSUECTOT
SEUEANLPOCENSCINLRAIS.

Kennedy looked vacantly at the message. It appeared to be a mere jumble of letters.

"Humph!" exclaimed Sinclair. "What good is that?"

"I can't say," replied Kennedy. "And yet why should any one send a message like that unless it were in a cipher and he had something to conceal?"

There was no disputing Kennedy's reasoning. It must be a cipher-message, though from whom and to whom and what it contained not even the marvelous radio-detective could tell. I wondered whether Kennedy could fathom it.

Craig wrote it out, reversed, and read off the letters slowly, but that did not seem to do any good. It was no plainer forward than backward.

"There must be some key," he persisted, looking it over thoughtfully.

I felt like urging haste, but when I considered how helpless I would be myself, I realized that such urging would come from me with very ill grace.

"Can't you apply the rules that are usually used in deciphering ciphers?" asked Sinclair. "For instance, you know E is the most commonly used letter. How many letters are there and what is the most commonly used? That must stand for E."

"Exactly what I am trying to do," replied Kennedy quietly, his brow still puckered in thought as he bit the end of a pencil nervously. "There are eighteen E's here already. E itself is here the most commonly used letter, and, as you say, E is the commonest letter that we have. It looks to me," he added slowly, "as if E must stand for E."

Over and over he studied the series of letters, comparing his results with a table he carried in his pocketbook, giving the relative frequency of various letters, combinations of letters and the most common short words such as "the" and "and" and others.

Patiently he studied it, using every method he could think of to unlock the mystery quickly. And yet, after perhaps half an hour's work with paper and pencil, covering sheets with figures that looked as if he were doing sums, he had arrived at the significance of only half a dozen letters, and that without any certainty, for it did not make the message read intelligibly even yet.

"Of course I can do it by the long scientific method, if I take the time," he remarked, pausing thoughtfully and somewhat vexed at the obstacles the thing afforded. "But in the meantime who knows what may be taking place?"

He was looking at the message first forward, as he had written it, then reversed. As he looked at it, he tapped absently on the edge of the desk with his pencil, more to relieve his impatience than for anything else.

Suddenly his pencil-tapping ceased. It seemed as if an idea had suddenly occurred to him.

Slowly he wrote out both versions of the message in the dots and dashes of the Morse alphabet.

Still, to me, it meant nothing. But Kennedy appeared to be at last highly elated. He ran his eye over what he had written again, then paused a moment, and began tapping on the table with his pencil.

"By George, that's it, Sinclair," he cried. "Here's the original message as we got it. Now I reverse it, tapping off its letters just as they come in Morse. Do you catch the idea? First they wrote the message out in ordinary words. Then that was translated into the dots and dashes of the Morse code. That in turn was reversed, and then that reversion was reduced to letters again."

Sinclair nodded, as we followed him excitedly.

"You know there are some letters that would come out in the cipher just as in the original, for in Morse they are just the same one way as the other—symmetrical. E is such a letter, so is I and O and a lot of others. But there are just enough which, when reversed, make some other letter to make such a cipher most difficult. For instance, take A, which is a dot and dash. Reverse that and a dash and dot stand for N. Therefore, wherever you find an A in this cipher replace it by N, and vice versa. Oh, this is easy now," he gloated, as we watched him with both wonder and satisfaction at the ease with which he had finally solved it.

They had sent the message backward in Morse. Kennedy did not bother to translate it further. He seized his pencil and with it quickly clicked off the letters, taking the message backward, in reverse order, and Sinclair wrote down the new, translated latters as he called them off.

It was the work of scarcely more than a minute and we had the original message which some one had gone to so much trouble to conceal in the transmission. It read:

> Sinclair's aeroplane destroyed somehow today. Have you located Morelos yet? Secret Service agents here. Can you get us away quietly tonight?
>
> SANCHEZ.

Kennedy looked at the message with puckered face a long time. I do not think he himself could quite figure out what it meant at first.

Sinclair was the first to speak.

"Evidently, then, Sanchez does not know what caused the disaster to my aeroplane," he remarked simply.

"No," replied Kennedy. "That puzzles me. Yet it is possible that many things may be going on, almost under his eyes, and he might not realize their importance. What puzzles me is that, although he did not know the cause of the disaster, he seems to know about that message I sent to New

York for my apparatus and to have found out who we are and something of why we are here."

* * *

KENNEDY had returned to his radio-detective and was hastily running it along again. He had passed several perfectly intelligible messages that had been caught and recorded, but were of no value to us, when he paused again.

"There's what I was looking for," he cried, "the cipher again. It must be the reply. By George, it comes from across the Sound, from Bridgeport, as nearly as I can make it."

He ran the thing over slowly and copied down another message, reversed it, and translated through the Morse.

"What is it?" we asked breathlessly.

"It is signed Alvarez," he answered excitedly. "They must have separated. Evidently Alvarez has been on the trail of Morelos since Burke seized the arms. His message is:

> "Have discovered Morelos in Bridgeport. He has not the plans and knows nothing of them. Will cross Sound in power-boat immediately and get you.
>
> ALVAREZ.

"That's another puzzle, too," he added, as he finished reading.

"I should say so," rejoined Sinclair. "As nearly as I can make out, neither Sanchez or Ruiz here nor Alvarez knows anything about the disaster. And apparently neither does Morelos, the Revolutionist leader, know. Nobody seems to know."

Sinclair was nonplused.

"Still, that may not mean that they know nothing about the stolen plans," remarked Kennedy quietly, as he read over the message again. "Apparently they knew perfectly well that the plans had been stolen. It does not tell us which party stole them or who has them, it is true, but it does go a long step in clearing up the mystery. We don't know how Madame Valcour got them or who got them from her, but we are on the road at last to finding that out."

Sinclair had taken the two messages and was reading them over again.

"You are right," he exclaimed, as he laid them down again. "Those people over at Seaville evidently fear us. The last train up to the city had gone when that message was sent, for there isn't very good service in that direction at night. They have called for help by wireless and Alvarez is coming to get them away in the best manner possible. That is the way I figure it out, at least."

"And that is right," agreed Kennedy. "Our problem is to intercept them."

Sinclair looked hastily at his watch, then out of the window at the Cimmerian darkness of the hundreds of square miles of water of the sheltered bays and harbors and the Sound beyond.

"How is it to be done?" he asked almost hopelessly.

We both looked at Kennedy as he stood there calm and collected. The radio-detective had unmasked the plotters. But was it too late to catch them?

CHAPTER XII

THE TRIPLE MIRROR

THE situation called for instant action. Yet what was there we could do, to all intents and purposes marooned down the bay from the Seaville House and the cottage? How in all that vast extent of blackness were we to discover anything?

Sinclair looked in amazement at Kennedy, calm and collected. I think for the moment he believed it was the calmness of despair.

"Couldn't we use the wireless in some way?" I asked desperately, without much idea of just how we might do it.

"Wireless—why they would be just as likely to pick it up and know everything instantly then," he replied, hurrying from the library without explaining his remark, and making his way down to the dock where the *Streamline* lay.

We followed but were able only to look about hopelessly.

Kennedy, however, was busily engaged over the peculiar apparatus which he lifted out of the hold of the little runabout. As far as I could make it out, it seemed to consist of nothing more than the peculiar prism of glass which he had exhibited to us before we left the Yacht Club.

It was, as I have said, one of those black, inky nights with no moon—one of those nights when the myriad lights on the boats far down the harbor twinkled as mere points in the darkness, scarcely discernible at such a distance.

As we stood on the end of the dock Kennedy seemed to be engrossed in the study in black.

Here and there a moving light might be seen as a boat made its way up or down the bay, but there was no way of determining who or what they were, or whether or not their errands were legitimate. Hunting a needle in a haystack seemed to be mere child's play to locating the power-boat of Alvarez and those who sought to avoid us.

SUDDENLY from the darkness a long finger of light swept out into the night, plainly enough marked near the source, but diffused and disclosing nothing in the distance as it reached us.

"The Yacht Club searchlight!" cried Sinclair.

I wondered what might be happening to Burke, whether he might not need us, or, if we tried to go to him, we might not overlook something of importance nearer where we now were.

"Yes," rejoined Kennedy, "Burke has trained the light down the bay in our direction."

By the time the beam reached us, though, it was so weak that it was lost.

Craig had leaped up on a railing and was capping and uncapping with the brass cover of the case the peculiar glass prism. I looked, uncomprehending, from him down at the wide path of light aimed at us, but apparently of no avail.

"What are you doing?" I asked hastily.

"Signaling with the triple mirror," he called back, still busy with the prism. "I thought we might have to use some means of communicating and I had this apparatus sent up here for the purpose. I hope Burke hasn't forgotten the code—it is simple enough."

I looked out again in the darkness, half expecting to see a ray of light, I suppose, emanating from us in the direction of Burke. Of course there was nothing.

Rapidly but deliberately Kennedy kept at work, which to us looked as futile as if he had tried to shout something over the distance with a megaphone.

Sinclair was more frankly sceptical than I, although he said nothing. He took a few steps toward the *Streamline* as if that were something tangible in which he could put faith.

"I'll be ready in a moment, Sinclair," shouted Kennedy. "Just wait till I get Burke started."

Sinclair waited impatiently.

"What would have been the matter with using wireless?" he remarked more to me than to Craig.

Craig overheard it.

"In this case the triple mirror is even better than wireless," he hastened, still working with it. "Besides, wireless requires heavy and complicated apparatus. This is portable, heatless, almost weightless—a source of light depending for its power on another source at a great distance."

I wondered how Burke could ever be expected to detect such a feeble ray as came from the triple morror, but said nothing.

"Even from a rolling ship," continued Kennedy, alternately capping and uncapping the mirror, "the beam of light which this prism reflects always goes back, unerring, to its source. It would do so, Sinclair, from an aeroplane so high in the air that it could not be located."

Sinclair now for the first time seemed interested. He was scientist enough to appreciate that it was something new in the application of the laws of light that Kennedy was using.

"It must be tremendously accurate," he remarked, his scepticism shaken.

"It is. The returning beam is invisible to any one not immediately in the path of the ray, and you can see what a slight chance there can be of some one being so situated. The ray always goes to the observer. It is simply a matter of pure mathematics, practically applied. The angle of incidence equals the angle of reflection. You recall how no matter how you looked into the prism you saw your reflection accurately?"

"Yes, but when you are dealing in miles it must be a very different matter," persisted Sinclair.

"There isn't a variation of a foot in two miles," asserted Kennedy confidently.

Sinclair subsided, convinced at last.

Craig had finished flashing his quick message along the invisible beam of the searchlight.

"What message did you send him?" I asked.

"I told him simply that they were trying to avoid us and asked him to watch the roads away from the hotel and cottage. I said that we could take care of the bay, if he would show the lights."

"Lights—what lights?" I asked.

Kennedy was peering through a little telescope which was attached to the case beside the triple mirror.

"Burke is signaling back to us!" he cried. "Good—he gets me perfectly—is going over to Seaville House—we can meet him there unless there is something for us to do elsewhere."

He was hastily packing up the apparatus which had served us so well in a tight pinch.

"Now, Sinclair," he added briskly, "this is the time when you can show us what your boat can do. If it isn't too late, we may be able to catch these people before they can slip out of our hands."

"I'm afraid I can't get the speed out of her at night that I got this afternoon," replied Sinclair cautiously. "It's risky enough trying to get up to a mile-a-minute speed in the daytime, but at night it's suicidal. I don't dare to let her out."

* * *

WE CROWDED into the *Streamline* as quickly as we could, Sinclair taking his place at the wheel, and cast off.

"Start slowly then," urged Craig. "It won't hurt. We shall have to take in just how things are at first, anyhow. You can cut loose in a moment."

Neither Sinclair nor I said anything, but I am sure both of us wondered how it was going to be safer to speed the boat up a few minutes later than now. Kennedy was eagerly looking up the harbor in the direction of the Yacht Club with an expectant air as if something might happen at any moment.

Cautiously at first Sinclair drove us along, gradually increasing the speed, but carefully devoting his entire attention to the running of the boat.

Suddenly there came a boom, as if from a gun, far away in the direction in which Kennedy was peering. Sinclair quickly shut off his motor and gazed about in surprise. Then came another from the same direction.

"What's that?" we both asked, startled.

"There are the lights!" Kennedy exclaimed.

Another instant and from every quarter, up the bay toward which we were headed, showed what seemed to be huge balls of fire, literally rising from the sea, with a brilliantly luminous flame.

"Wh-what is it?" gasped Sinclair again.

Kennedy had risen in the boat and was looking about eagerly.

"A German invention," he replied, "for use at night against attacks from torpedo boats and aeroplanes."

"And they are using them against us?" I asked, forgetting in the excitement Kennedy's remark a short time before about the lights.

"No, no," he answered testily. "Don't you remember the mortar I set up at the club. From it Burke has shot half a dozen of these bombs."

Sinclair had recovered from his surprise and started his engine again.

"What are they made of?" he asked.

"Phosphid of calcium," returned Kennedy briefly. "The mortar hurls them out far in every direction into the darkness. They are so constructed that they float after a short plunge into the water. The action of the salt water automatically ignites them merely by contact, and the chemical action of the phosphid and the water keeps them phosphorescing for several minutes."

Sinclair was as ready to praise as he had been to criticize a few minutes before.

"My hat off to you, Kennedy," he ejaculated. "You seem to have prepared for almost any emergency. It's splendid—splendid!"

I could quite agree with him. The sight which the calcium bombs unfolded about us was indeed a beautiful pyrotechnic display. They lighted up the shores and the high-lying hills about the bay in an almost spectral manner. Cottages hidden among the trees, or in coves here and there along the sweep of shore-line, seemed to stand out as if in an unearthly flare.

What the people about the shore must have thought I could only guess. Here and there we could see them crowding out on the porches and pointing in consternation at what appeared to be impossible bonfires in the very water itself.

Every craft in the harbor was shown as distinctly as if the glare of the sun shone on it, and the excitement on the boats was even greater than on the shore, for the people on them were closer and more amazed at what they saw.

Together we scanned the bay carefully for any sign of a boat moving suspiciously.

"There it is," cried Kennedy, bending

forward nervously and pointing almost directly ahead of us.

We strained our eyes. Perhaps half a mile from the Seaville House we could distinguish a power-boat moving swiftly in and out among the craft at anchor, trying frantically to reach the open water.

"Cut them off!" ordered Kennedy.

Sinclair swung his helm just a trifle so as to cross their course as they came down toward us and crowded on all the speed his speedy hull could make. With the muffler cut out we awakened the echoes of the hills as if it had been an international race.

"That ought to throw a scare into them," approved Kennedy. "Keep it up."

THEN followed as wild a dash across the harbor as I would care to take, day or night. The spray from the *Streamline* rose in a cloud, and the wind taking it drenched us. But Sinclair did not care. He had fallen into the spirit of the chase and, as now and then a wild shout was wafted to us from the shore, he knew that all eyes were on him and that Westport wanted to know what the famous little craft could do.

Kennedy had not reckoned without a knowledge of psychology. It was only an instant that the people in the power-boat might have doubted that they were our object. They saw us and they saw at the same time that there could be only a question of seconds when the *Streamline* would be up with them.

The phosphid bombs were holding out splendidly and, as the power-boat came between one of them and us, we could just distinguish the people in it, though at the distance it was impossible to recognize them, of course.

"There are five of them besides the man managing the boat," muttered Kennedy, "and one of them, at least, seems to be a woman."

"They're turning," interrupted Sinclair with just a touch of pride and satisfaction at the compliment they paid his boat.

"Swing around—and beat them to it whatever they head for," exhorted Craig.

The power-boat had turned as short as its pilot dared and was now retracing its course in the direction of the Seaville House. We had evidently caught them in the nick of time, for a few minutes longer and they would have been down the bay and perhaps out of reach of the phosphid glare that betrayed them.

Apparently their idea was to gain the pier of the hotel, where at least they would be on an equality with us, for their boat, whatever might be its cruising radius, was simply no match in speed for ours.

"Can Burke intercept them?" I asked anxiously as I reasoned out their plan.

"He has Sinclair's car which we left at the club," replied Kennedy. "He ought to."

"Look over the shore-road," put in Sinclair. "You ought to be able to see if there is a car there."

Sure enough, where the road ran for some distance along the very edge of the bay, shaded by a few sparse locust trees, we could catch a glimpse of a car tearing along at a breakneck speed, its siren horn warning others at the curves in the road and adding one more feature to the excitement.

Would Burke be able to get there? Could he do the distance in time? The Seaville House was not far from the club, but at one point the road bent back, away from the bay, and we now no longer could distinguish Burke.

Sinclair was speeding the runabout to the limit, even here where the shipping was thick. On either side of us I could see the boats at anchor rocking wildly from the waves that we plowed up in huge furrows.

They had reached the dock of the hotel, and we could see them pile out and run up it. It was only a moment later when Sinclair shut off his power and with a daring flourish, regardless of the varnish of the *Streamline*, brought us to the opposite side of the float.

Kennedy sprang ashore ahead of us and sprinted up the dock, through an excited crowd that had gathered to witness an event that they did not understand yet could fully enjoy.

"Which way did they go?" we cried breathlessly.

The bystanders pointed up the hill beside the hotel, as if that were quicker than words.

Panting, puffing, perspiring, we followed the directions, Kennedy several yards ahead of us.

As we turned the corner of the roadway, we came upon the hotel garage, deserted by the employees in the excitement on the bay. One of them came running toward us.

"Six of them—they stole a car—I saw 'em from the hotel-porch—couldn't get here quick enough!" he blurted out.

Another moment and the curious crowd had surrounded us, all talking at once, each one with a different plan.

None of us said a word.

They had escaped!

CHAPTER XIII

THE WIRELESS WIRE-TAPPER

A MOMENT later Burke came dashing around the curve in the road in Sinclair's car and the crowd scattered to let him pass. On the front seat with him was Mrs. Hawley.

"Where are they—have you got them?" he cried.

"No," replied Kennedy, though not in a tone of criticism.

It had been a close race and Burke had done his best, for it had been necessary for him to remain at the club to fire the mortar with the calcium bombs. Without them the power-boat might have slipped away unobserved, but the time taken in getting off had been just a minute too much.

A hasty parley followed and as many cars as could be pressed into service were started out along the possible routes that the fugitives had taken, while Kennedy and Burke sought the telegraph operator at the hotel to spread an alarm as quickly as they could to the neighboring villages through which they might pass.

Sinclair and Mrs. Hawley were engaged in earnest conversation when Craig and Burke returned. She was telling him of the dash they had made from the club, and how she had insisted on accompanying Burke.

It was evident that, whatever might be said of the Mexican acquaintances of Sinclair, Mrs. Hawley had justified Kennedy's judgment of her and had proved faithful.

Craig had thrown off all disguise now, at least before her, and was questioning her frankly about the character and habits of the people in the cottage, whom we had met once at the caberet. I think even Hattie Hawley was surprised at her own ignorance of the intimate life of her acquaintances, before Kennedy had gone very far. She had known them on the surface pretty well, but with characteristic secretiveness they had succeeded in completely concealing for instance, their domestic arrangements, both in the city and at Seaville.

On other visits to Seaville they had spent much of their time at the hotel, especially on the occasion when Madame Valcour had been there and Sinclair had gone out of his way to entertain the fascinating adventuress. But this time they had evidently come prepared to live more quietly, for they had brought along two Japanese whom she had seen now and then at the Mexican cabaret.

When it was all sifted down, it was practically only at the cabaret and in their dignified mescal debauches that Mrs. Hawley knew them. I think Sinclair was rather pleased than otherwise at it, for he saw that she had been in reality working more to protect their mutual interests in southern Mexico than for any other reason. However, that did not do us much good just at present.

"While we're waiting for some report," cut in Kennedy bruskly, after Mrs. Hawley had told what little she could of the story, "suppose we go up the hill and take a look at the cottage."

He had already started ahead, Burke and I following and Sinclair and Mrs. Hawley bringing up the rear.

We stood for a few moments in the shadow of a hedge while Craig sent Burke, as an expert in that sort of thing, scouting about the house to make sure that it was deserted. Burke quickly returned from the shadow of a barn which had been remade into a garage.

"There doesn't seem to be a sign of life in the house," he reported.

"Then let's take a chance," decided Craig, who had employed the time in gazing at the wireless mast that was fixed on one of the gables and had interested him the first time he saw the house.

We advanced to the door and, as a precaution, rang the bell while Burke hastily ascertained that the windows were locked also. No one answered, and together we forced the door and burst into the silent and dark house.

* * *

IT WAS scantily furnished after the manner of most Summer cottages, but it was not the furniture that interested Craig.

"I've been wondering about that wireless business," he remarked, leading us from room to room.

He paused with an exclamation as he came to a room on the first floor in an extension on the side of the house which gave a view of the bay.

On a mission table before the window were all the paraphernalia of a wireless telegraph outfit. Quickly Kennedy ran his eye over it as he picked up piece after piece. He seemed to be more than usually interested.

"This is a curious type," I heard him mutter to himself. "It's not exactly like any other that I've seen."

We gathered about him, none of us knowing much about it, except possibly Sinclair who for the time being seemed to be more interested in the study of Mrs. Hawley than in wireless.

"Spark-gap of the quenched type," remarked Kennedy jerkily, noting one thing after another. "Break system relay—the operator could overhear any interference while he was transmitting. You make the transformation by a single throw of a six-point switch which times the oscillating and open currents to resonance. That's it—it can be easily changed from one wave length to another."

"They always seemed to know more about you than I did," we overheard Mrs. Hawley saying to Sinclair. "I don't know—but I used to think you were pretty intimate with them."

"Only in the same way that I tried to keep on as good terms as I could with the Revolutionists," he replied with a laugh. "There was no telling which side would come out on top in the end. But how they managed to know so——"

"Easy enough," cut in Craig who had overheard, too. "Look at this wireless wire-tapping. It beats even the one I improvised. Why, Sinclair, you couldn't receive or send a message through the Seaville Station that they couldn't overhear. They knew every time you sent out your aeroplane for a trial—could 'feel' it, as it were, through this apparatus."

Sinclair bent over it and at once recognized the cleverness with which it had been devised.

"It needed only that they were listening in to read that message I sent to my laboratory in New York," Craig continued. "I half suspected something of the kind and thought I'd give them a chance—but they have been too clever for us—at least in the first round."

Sinclair was speechless with amazement, While Madame Valcour had been monopolizing his time, some one here had been at work in another direction spying on him, perhaps waiting the most favorable opportunity for using the burglar's microphone to enter his safe and rob him of the perfected plans of the air-ship.

I tried vainly to piece the scattered events together. Supposing it had been Sanchez, using Valcour, who had stolen the plans and then had entrusted them to Valcour for safe-keeping. Who had got them from Valcour and how? Had it been Morelos? Kennedy's radio-detective had reported that Alvarez had said Morelos knew nothing of them. I was forced to give it up. We were getting warmer in the search it was true, but as yet there seemed to be more heat than light.

Sinclair, too, appeared to be considering the same problem and with no greater success than I had.

"That's wonderful," he remarked glancing over the clever wireless-outfit before us. "But I can't understand yet about that accident to the aeroplane. Do you imagine these people knew anything about that?"

"I've been wondering that myself," commented Kennedy. "Suppose we hunt through the house a little farther. There seems to be nothing to prevent us."

"Yes, that's it," I put in, "what could have been that terror in the air?"

We followed Kennedy as he went slowly up the stairs, looking from right to left in every room as we went. There was nothing out of the ordinary on the second floor and we mounted on up to the attic where there seemed to be two finished rooms.

Kennedy groped about in the darkness of one room in which was the dormer window of the gable, knocked something down, and finally found the light, switching it on.

"Ah!" he exclaimed as he looked about at a peculiar apparatus filling the room, "I suspected some wireless-power trick. Here it is."

IT WAS a most unusual collection of coils of wires and other paraphernalia of which I had never seen the like before.

Kennedy turned a switch. A curious crackling, snapping noise issued from the machine. In it we saw a sheet of flame several feet long, a veritable artificial bolt of lightning. The rest of us shrank back in momentary fear at the apparently gigantic forces of nature which seemed let loose in the room.

"Don't be afraid," called Kennedy. "I've seen all this before. It won't hurt you. It's an application of a high-frequency current."

Whatever it was I could not overcome the awe which it inspired in me. I wondered how the arch-fiend had restrained himself from turning the deadly power on us.

Kennedy continued to experiment gingerly with the apparatus, and finally shut it off.

"That's all very well," persisted Sinclair, who had been watching carefully, "but I don't understand it yet."

"Don't you see?" urged Kennedy, looking at the machine with an air of great admiration. "What this fellow has really done is to use a high-frequency current—to appropriate simply the invention of Nikola Tesla."

We were trying to follow him, and Sinclair nodded acquiescence, comprehending only vaguely.

"What is it based upon?" he asked at length.

"Tesla's theory," explained Kennedy, continuing to explore the dormer-window room, "is that under certain conditions the atmosphere, which is normally a high insulator, assumes conducting properties and so becomes capable of conveying any amount of electrical energy.

"I myself have seen electrical oscillations such as those which you saw just now of such intensity that while they could be circulated with impunity through one's arms and chest, they could be made to melt wires farther along in the circuit. Yet the person through whom such a current was passing at the time actually felt no inconvenience."

Kennedy was holding us spellbound by this new wonder of science as he elaborated it.

"I have seen a loop of heavy copper wire," he continued, "energized by such oscillations and a mass of metal within the loop heated to the fusing point, and yet into the space in which this destructive aerial turmoil was going on I have seen men thrust their hands and even their heads without feeling anything or experiencing any injurious after effect. In this form all the energy of all the dynamos at Niagara could pass through one's body and yet produce no injury. But, diabolically directed, this vast energy has been used to melt the wires in the little dynamo that runs the gyroscope of the aeroplane. That was the cause of the disaster."

We stood amazed at the ingenuity of it and not a little in awe of the hand and brain that could conceive and wield such an engine of destruction so certainly for their own ends.

"Whom do you suppose could have operated it all?" I asked.

"Operated it all?" he repeated. "As a matter of fact, they seem to me to be entirely distinct systems, although the operator of this system of projecting wireless-power must have used at least a part of the outside apparatus of the wireless wire-tapper for the transmission of his destructive current."

Just then we heard the tread of feet downstairs and a voice called up—

"Mr. Sinclair!"

"Yes," answered the inventor.

"We've got a report," called back the voice.

"It's the operator at the Seaville House," explained Sinclair, leaving the room hurriedly, followed by Kennedy and the rest of us.

"What is the report?" he inquired.

"The car has been seen along the Sound road—they are evidently heading for the city."

"Is there no way to intercept them?" inquired Kennedy.

"I'm afraid not," answered Sinclair slowly. "You see, it is so late that we can't possibly get any of the constables in the towns, and as for the city, there are scores of routes they can take to enter it, if indeed they attempt it by means of the car at all. No, I'm afraid that is hopeless, now."

Kennedy had taken a last look about the cottage. They had evidently prepared for flight and everything else that could be taken or destroyed had been removed.

"We're wasting time here, then," he concluded. "The best we can do is to follow them to the city and search for them there."

"There aren't any trains," put in the operator.

"I know it," returned Kennedy. "I wasn't thinking of trains. We'll have to make it in Sinclair's car. We can't wait until morning."

Mrs. Hawley insisted on accompanying us, and a few minutes later Kennedy, Sinclair, Burke, Mrs. Hawley and myself were threading our way along the roads leading to New York, making pretty good time in spite of the difficult driving at night.

It was far past midnight when we arrived over the uptown bridge in New York, and arriving there, the question was where to go.

"Why not the cabaret?" suggested Mrs. Hawley. "That was their headquarters. They would not stay there, I suppose, but they might stop there."

"Good," agreed Kennedy. "There is at least a chance."

THE streets were deserted, and it was only a matter of minutes before we pulled up as quietly as we could before the place which, of course, to all outward appearance was closed.

A tap on the door brought no response from the lookout, although that was to be expected. Craig and Burke did not wait longer than to tap, but with the aid of a lever from the car succeeded in forcing the door and entering cautiously, prepared for a surprise.

The place was as still as if it had been deserted. If there had been any one there when we arrived they must have made their escape, perhaps over the roofs.

Upstairs we followed Kennedy and Burke.

As we entered the private dining-room in which we had once attended the strange mescal party, Kennedy turned the switch and flooded the place with light.

Craig uttered a low exclamation.

There lay the beautiful Señora Ruiz, tall, almost imperial in her beautiful gown.

He bent over and tried to lift her up. As he did so, a gold bracelet, unclasped, clattered to the floor.

He picked it up and glanced hurriedly at it. It was hollow. But in that part where it unclasped could be seen a minute hypodermic needle and traces of a brownish liquid.

"A poison-bracelet," he muttered to himself, looking from it to a long scratch on the fair arm of the Señora. "One in which poison could be hidden so that in an emergency death could cheat the law."

She was still breathing, but her convulsed face showed that even Kennedy's hasty restoratives had no effect.

"The others!" exclaimed Burke who stood behind us, looking from the deadly bracelet to the insensible beauty, and slowly comprehending what it all might mean. "The others—she alone knows where and who they are!"

Mrs. Hawley had taken the head of her former friend in her lap and was smoothing it gently, as she looked mutely at Kennedy.

What was to be done? Were the real criminals to escape because we had caught only an accomplice, and she had either chosen or been forced to choose the easiest way of escape?

CHAPTER XIV

THE ARTIFICIAL KIDNEY

"CALL up Dr. Leslie right away, Walter," cried Kennedy making a quick decision, "then hurry down to the car. I am going to the laboratory."

Señora Ruiz had been lifted to a couch and the rest remained at the Mexican cabaret while Craig and I made a quick dash to the laboratory. Not a moment was wasted. He jumped from the car almost before it had stopped and went directly to a cupboard in which was locked a large oblong case.

We were back again, almost before they fairly expected us. Señora Ruiz was still alive though breathing with difficulty.

Without an instant's delay he had his coat off and was opening the case. We watched helplessly as he took from it a peculiar arrangement and laid it carefully on the table. It seemed to consist of innumerable little tubes, each about sixteen inches long, with S-turns that made it look like a miniature glass radiator.

"There is just one chance," he said, working feverishly. "I wish Leslie would come —I need him."

Altogether the apparatus could not have been much over a cubic foot in size, and it was enclosed in a glass cylinder through which we could see a hundred feet or more of the tubes, a perfectly closed tubular system.

"I have kept this absolutely sterile in a germicidal solution," he went on, scrubbing away at his hands and nails now with an antiseptic solution. "Inside those tubes and surrounding them is a saline solution which is kept at a uniform temperature by means of a special heating-apparatus."

The table had been drawn up alongside the couch and on it was placed the apparatus beside the unconscious Señora.

A noise outside announced the arrival of the coroner and a moment later he hurried into the room.

"What's the matter?" he asked breathlessly, endeavoring to take in the situation but not understanding it.

"Just in time, Doctor," exclaimed Kennedy visibly relieved at the presence of a medical man. "I need you."

Briefly and in a low tone which we could not catch he proceeded to tell Leslie just enough of what had happened and what he proposed to attempt so that they could go ahead.

"Perhaps a little anesthetic—just enough to insure keeping her under—would make it easier," commented Leslie reaching into his case for the paraphernalia.

He, too, seemed possessed by a germicidal mania, and after the quick but thorough ablution, gently administered just enough of a narcotic to stop the convulsive movements which might have interfered with their work.

We stood, scarcely speaking a word, in the far corner of the room while Kennedy and Leslie wasted no time. First they attached the end of one of the tubes, by means of a little silver ring or cannula to the carotid artery, and then a tube from the other end of the apparatus to the jugular vein in the Señora's neck.

"Is it all right?" asked Leslie of Kennedy when he had finished the surgical work.

"Yes," answered Craig with a thorough glance over what had been done, "yes—you can release it."

As Dr. Leslie released the clamp which held the artery just above where it had been severed, the still wildly beating heart of Señora Ruiz seemed to spurt the arterial blood from the carotid into the tubes which held the normal salt solution now at blood heat.

It was astounding to see the human body working almost with the same precision as a machine. That arterial pressure, in turn, pumped the salt solution which filled the tubes, into the jugular vein. It required no more than the exercise of common sense to see that that was necessary, replacing the arterial blood that had been poured into the tubes from the other end, and thus maintaining the normal hydrostatic conditions in the body-circulation.

We stood rooted to the spot by the marvel of the thing. She was actually being kept alive although perhaps a third of her blood was outside of her body.

Our own interest could not, however, rival that of Kennedy and Leslie who, in the professional excitement of trying to save a lost life, were oblivious for the time to everything except their work and their patient. They were giving their undivided attention to the success of the operation, and it was only after some minutes of anxious observation that they even seemed to notice that the rest of the world existed.

* * *

SINCLAIR was the first to speak, for the rest of us were simply speechless with wonder. Kennedy and Leslie had at last straightened up and were regarding the automatic working of the machine before them with undisguised satisfaction.

"What is that, Kennedy?" ventured Sinclair.

"What I have here," returned Kennedy slowly, not taking his eyes for a second off the thing, "is in reality an artificial kidney."

Burke looked at me, incredulity written all over his face, as if it was blasphemous even to try to improve on the organs that nature had given us. Incredible as it seemed, we could not but believe, for there was the apparatus before us working, apparently, as smoothly as a watch.

"It is a system devised recently by several very noted doctors at Johns Hopkins," corroborated Leslie in a manner which showed that as a physician he would not have missed the opportunity of seeing the thing for thousands of dollars.

"Yes," continued Kennedy, "when there is a toxin or poison in the blood, the kidneys naturally endeavor to eliminate it. But often, as in this case, an emergency arises and it is eliminated too slowly. Then this arrangement is intended to aid nature in a work she never designed the human kidney to do."

"What do you call it?" prompted Sinclair who, although not a medical man, was a scientist and felt the keen spirit of pioneering which all true scientists have.

"We call it vividiffusion," answered

Craig. "Fundamentally it depends for its action on the physical principle of osmosis. You know that if substances of a certain kind are placed in solution next to each other and separated only by a thin porous membrane, there will take place and interchange of the molecules or ions of the one substance with those of the other until the two liquids are completely mixed. It is an important property—without it life such as we know it would be impossible. These tubes, which perhaps you have thought were made of glass, are really made of a porous substance known as celloidin."

"Then you mean to say that the poison in her blood," I exclaimed, "is passing slowly through those celloidin walls into that salt solution which surrounds the tubes?"

"Precisely," he returned. "Any substance, any poison that is dialyzable is diffused into the surrounding salt solution and the blood is passed back into the body, with no air in it, no infection, no further alteration. And as it is done while the person is still living, we call it, as I told you, vividiffusion—a sort of living osmosis, after the manner that it goes on normally in the body itself."

Dr. Leslie himself, although he had heard of it, did not seem to be entirely clear on the matter.

"What have you done to prevent clotting?" he asked.

"That has been provided against. Clotting is prevented by the injection of a harmless substance known as hirudin—something derived from leeches."

"Yes," put in Sinclair who had been revolving the thing in his mind, "but won't that dialyze out other substances besides those you want to remove?"

"I prevent the loss of anything in the blood which I want retained," explained Kennedy, "by placing in the salt solution first, around the outside of the tubes, an amount of that substance equal to that held in solution by the blood. In that way, you see, we keep the blood and salt solution in balance, as it were, and nothing happens in regard to such substances."

"And of course," cut in Leslie, "all substances in the blood are not capable of diffusion, you know."

"Oh, of course," agreed Kennedy. "The colloidal substances, for instance, would not pass out by osmosis anyhow. It is only the crystallizable elements which are capable of diffusion. And it is precisely those elements that we want to reach. Yet by these delicate adjustments doctors can remove and discover any desired substance in the blood that is capable of elimination at all, in such a way."

"I see," agreed Sinclair. "It does in a way just the work that the kidneys do in elimination."

Kennedy nodded.

"In fact this little apparatus, with its one hundred and ninety-two tubes," he added, "has been found in practise to compare favorably with the kidneys themselves in removing even a deadly dose of poison. That was why I thought of it instantly in this case."

Sinclair turned to Mrs. Hawley.

"I hope she lives," she breathed fervently. "Whatever her faults, I always rather liked the Señora."

"Yes," put in Sinclair, "there have been tragedies enough in this unfortunate affair."

Burke shook his head doubtfully.

"They are a violent people," he remarked. "They don't seem to value human life any more than if they were so many head of cattle."

As for me, I was unable to take my mind off the process that was going on before us. Kennedy was actually cleaning the blood of the gay little dancer and then putting it back again—getting rid of an elusive, subtle, fatal poison. I recalled his previous work in tracing out the poison and how it had been interrupted and wondered whether now we should be any closer in fixing it definitely upon some one.

Craig and Leslie were paying no attention to the remarks of the rest.

"How long would you keep this up?" Leslie asked.

Kennedy glanced at his watch.

"The fact is," he replied, "this process can be kept up for several hours without injury, if we are as careful as we have been so far. But I don't think that will be necessary in this case after we have relieved the unusual strain that has been put on the vital organs."

"Stopping the process, I suppose, is as ticklish as starting it," Sinclair remarked.

"Yes," replied Kennedy. "I'm glad you spoke of that. If anything should call me away suddenly, I think I can trust Dr. Leslie with that just as well, perhaps better, than myself. You see, Doctor, finally, at the close of the operation, serious loss of blood is overcome by driving back the greater part of it into the body, including of course, now, much of the salt solution. The artery and vein are closed up, of course, and the patient is carefully treated so that she will make a quick recovery. There is usually no difficulty on that score."

Minute after minute we watched the fascinating process of seeing the life-blood coursing through the porous tubes immersed in the salt solution, while Kennedy gave his undivided attention to the success of the delicate operation.

It was, however, after all a tedious process, and as it became more and more automatic and allowed of relaxing attention just a little, Kennedy's active mind resumed the consideration of other features of the case.

"I've just been thinking," remarked Kennedy, coming over to us, "that if we are to clear this thing up, there is no use in our all standing here doing nothing. Burke, your secret-service men must have had lines out about Morelos. According to the last report we had, he was in Bridgeport. He certainly did not cross the Sound in the power-boat, and if he knew that we were out at Westport he would never think that we had returned to New York so soon. I should think that some of your men might find a trace of him. The chances are ten to one that he has returned to the city, at least for a flying visit."

Burke nodded.

"I'll do the best I can," he said. "Perhaps they have been able to get something out of the men we captured the other night. But how about Alvarez and Sanchez?"

Kennedy turned significantly toward the Señora.

"I think she can tell us about them, if we can pull her through," he replied. "While you are trying to run down Morelos, I wish Jameson would get in touch with Police Headquarters. We may as well have all the railroads, ferries and steamships watched, although I can't say how much good it will do."

Burke left and I hastened to get Police Headquarters on the wire and have a general alarm sent out for the two missing representatives of the Mexican Federals.

A minute search of the cabaret from roof to cellar, with the aid of Sinclair, failed to elicit any further evidence. There was not a soul there. Either the place had been deserted, except for Señora Ruiz, when we entered or the others had succeeded in fleeing.

We returned to the private dining-room where Kennedy and Leslie were still at work. Mrs. Hawley, showing the effects of the strain of the night, was sticking bravely to her post.

"I think you had better let me drive you in the car around to a hotel," suggested Sinclair finally. "You look tired out. The Vanderveer is only just around the corner."

The mere mention of the name of the hotel seemed to arouse something in Mrs. Hawley. She looked up quickly and I knew that it had suggested to her the strange death of Valcour.

"Oh," hastened Sinclair, noticing it also, "any place will do. You ought not to wear yourself out."

"I think I shouldn't be able to rest much anyway yet," she murmured, looking up at him. "Please let me stay. I'm just as anxious to know how it turns out as the rest of you."

There was something in her voice that arrested my attention. Sinclair had seen it already. His remark had started again a train of thought about Valcour and the attentions he had paid the adventuress both at the Seaville House and the Vanderveer.

Sinclair bent over and made her more comfortable.

"I can't blame you," he remarked pointedly. "My interest in the case is exactly the same as yours. One can't see two—three—acquaintances—struck down as we have and not wish to have justice done."

She looked up quickly at the word "acquaintances," caught his eye, then glanced away again at the Señora across the room. It was not imagination, but I felt that she did not look so tired after that. I moved nearer Kennedy and Leslie, but in the stillness of the room I heard nothing further from them.

And thus the minutes lengthened into hours as the blood of the poisoned Señora Ruiz coursed through its artificial channels, literally being washed free of the toxin.

Would it succeed? Would vividiffusion bring back the unfortunate woman, even long enough for her to yield her secret and enable us to catch the real criminal? What if she died?

CHAPTER XV

THE ARROW POISON

"HAVE you any idea what the poison is?" asked Dr. Leslie at length, voicing the thought which had been in my own mind.

Kennedy nodded.

"A very clear idea," he said briefly.

"What is it?" asked Sinclair. "Some strange South American poison like *curare*, or is it one of those Mexican poisons that I have heard of, the *mariguana* weed or the *toluache?*"

Craig shook his head.

"Neither," he answered slowly.

Then as he saw the look of curiosity on all our faces, he went on deliberately—

"I suppose this is as good a time as any in which to tell of what I have discovered and what I expect to discover."

We pressed forward as he began to speak, hanging on his words and for the moment forgetful of the wretched woman on the couch, for whom science was fighting valiantly to clear up the mystery.

Kennedy reached into the pocket of his coat on a chair and drew forth the little reed-stick, with the buff-brown cylinder on the end. Simple though it was, it seemed now endowed with an awful power. He laid it on the table before us, our eyes riveted on it.

"That," he began solemnly, "is a little article which I picked up under the window of the extension in which Professor Neumeyer had his study and private museum. Mr. Sinclair will remember the occasion. It was while he was searching through the collection to discover whether anything was missing."

Kennedy was evidently calculating his psychology well. It was a weird hour, fast approaching the gray of dawn; the surroundings were such as to inspire fear. In my mind's eye I could see distinctly the picture that he conjured up—the terribly contorted face of the old archeologist, the uncanny idol squatting on the desk before him, the curious collection of the lore of ancient and almost forgotten races about him.

"What was missing, Sinclair?" shot out Kennedy, then, before Sinclair could answer he added quickly—"It was the so-called Pillar of Death—the porphyry block that told the secret of the buried Mixtec treasure, the block about which there had clustered innumerable superstitions."

Sinclair fairly gasped—

"How did you know that?"

"Never mind," pursued Kennedy evenly, "but I did know it, and others, many others, knew it. On the back of his neck I found a round red mark. It was the same as the mark I found on the arm of Valcour when first I saw her dead, alone, in her room at the Vanderveer."

The other picture flashed over me, of the proud adventuress, perhaps feeling the poison circulating through her veins, seeking to gain her room, only there to die. Where had she been? How had the poison been given her? And why?

"Some one," continued Craig, "has used the same poison twice—once to secure a secret which would make him, would make his government invincible, invulnerable, and again to secure for himself a fortune which would make of him a modern Crœsus. It was a high stake, worth playing for in his estimation, by every means, fair and foul—even the foulest and most barbaric."

Dr. Leslie had so far succeeded in shaking loose his attention from Kennedy as to lean over and touch the buff-brown cylinder with his finger.

"And this?" he asked. "What is this?"

"The barbaric means to his end which he chose," replied Kennedy impressively. "That little cylinder is a piece of *annonoki*, or *bushi*."

We stared at him blankly, having only a faint inkling of what it was. The mere words had in them something that showed us that this was no usual case. Who had used it, how he had obtained it, none of us asked, but allowed Craig to proceed now in his own way in explaining the mystery as far as he was able.

"Now," he resumed, looking at Dr. Leslie more than at the rest of us, "in the case of aconite poisoning, not only is the lethal dose very small but, as you know, our chemical methods of detection are almost valueless, if not quite so.

"The dose of the active principle, aconitin nitrate, is about one six-hundredth of a grain. There are no color tests, no reaction as in the case of many other organic poisons. It is no wonder that Dr. Leslie's men were unable to determine what the nature of the poison was in either the case of Valcour or later in the case of Neumeyer."

I WONDERED what he was driving at. Was there indeed no way, short of the actual fact of sudden death, to prove that they had died of poisoning, no test, no manner in which the poisonings could be fixed on some one? Had the murderer used the safest of poisons?

"Then it will be impossible to connect any one with these murders, I'm afraid," broke in Dr. Leslie, repeating what he had already said before in the laboratory. "You have admitted yourself that there is no test for aconitin, once it gets into the system. You couldn't even prove that it was some form of aconite that killed them."

We were all looking at Kennedy whose self-possession was unruffled. The bare possibility that the murderer might escape by some technicality was appalling.

"I have not said there was *no* test—absolutely none," he remarked quietly.

Kennedy paused as he raised this faint spark of hope, then went on:

"I suppose you never dreamed that starch granules might afford a method of tracing out the nature of a poison quite the equal of the blood-crystal tests by which we can now tell both the species of the animal from which blood comes and even the various races among men, perhaps soon the very individual from which certain drops of blood came."

"No," replied Dr. Leslie, "I have always considered that all starch was alike, in fact."

Kennedy smiled.

"Far from it," he went on. "Recently Dr. Edward Reichert of the University of Pennsylvania has discovered a new starch test, a means of detecting the nature of a poison in obscure cases in criminology, and especially in cases where the quantity of poison necessary to cause death is so minute that no trace of it can be found in the blood after a very short interval."

Kennedy was reveling now in what I call his minutiæ of crime, one of those almost ultra-microscopic methods of getting at the facts of a case and securing evidence where it seemed impossible.

"To me at least," he pursued, "the so-called 'starch method' is a novel and extremely inviting subject. Thus, according to modern research, the peculiarities of the starch granules of any plant are quite as distinctive of the plant as are the peculiarities of the hemoglobin crystals of the blood of an animal."

Dr. Leslie was following him intently now, scepticism overcome.

"When such a poison as aconite," pursued Craig, "is introduced subcutaneously, either by a needle-thrust delivered when a victim is partly under the influence of some other drug or drink, or when the victim is taken by surprise and off guard, the lethal constituents are rapidly absorbed. Formerly a murderer might have depended on that to defy detection. But not now. The starch from the poison remains in the wound. It can be recovered and studied microscopically.

"You will recall that I squeezed out drops of fluid from the little punctures both in Valcour's arm and Neumeyer's neck. Those glass slides contained starch granules which I have studied carefully under the microscope. Such granules can be recognized definitely, and I have recognized them. Dr. Reichert has made and published a minute study of twelve hundred starches from all sorts of plants and I have taken advantage of the immense amount of labor which he has done. For hours I studied and compared the granules. Dr. Leslie, in spite of what you have learned from the text-books, this poison was aconite—the active principle of which is the terribly deadly drug aconitin."

No one spoke as Kennedy, his face working with the energy he put into his exposition of the point, carried it through to its conclusion.

"More than that," he proceeded triumphantly, "it not only proves to have been aconitin which was used as the poisonous agent in these cases, but I am prepared to go even further and to assert that I have been able to recognize the particular variety of starch granules themselves." He was pointing his long, slender forefinger directly at the buff-brown cylinder which we had forgotten for the moment. "The poison came from that identical piece of arrow-poison, or as I called it, *annonoki*."

It was a startling conclusion. In spite of our weariness he had us all keyed up now, as step after step he led us along irresistibly the road to the conclusion which he himself had reached regarding the poison.

"Just what is this *annonoki?*" inquired Dr. Leslie to whom, as to the rest of us, the name had a strange and romantic sound.

KENNEDY paused a minute contemplatively.

"I am prepared to say positively that it is *annonoki*—aconite," he said at length. "I can even say something, as I have already done, of the method by which it was probably administered. But as to the place and the person or persons—" he paused and looked meaningly at Señora Ruiz, whom for the moment the rest of us had forgotten—"as to those questions we must wait until these lips open to solve the problem.

"But as for *annonoki* itself, it is well-known to many persons. Any one who has traveled has heard of arrow-poisons. Indeed that was one of the first things Mr. Sinclair thought about a few moments ago. *Annonoki* is an Aino arrow-poison."

Of a sudden there flashed over me the recollection of the peculiar, outlandish servant of Nichi Moto, Otaka, the Aino. True, there did not seem to be anything especially offensive about him, but I was about to pronounce his name, at least to test Kennedy by the expression of his face, when Sinclair interrupted.

"Alvarez was always a great friend of the Japanese who rule the Ainos, a great student in their customs," he cried. "I have heard much about his friendship for the race."

Kennedy said nothing, but I knew that he was thinking of the letter which we had taken from the little office out in the hall one night and read by the X-rays. In it Alvarez had been pictured as the friend of the Japanese, perhaps seeking a more cordial relationship between the Mexican and the Jap on the basis of their common origin.

"Yes," put in Mrs. Hawley, "Alvarez was always intimately concerned with anything Japanese. I have heard him talk of them and with them. It was only when he came to Westport that the Señora and Sanchez brought out the two Japanese—you remember."

Kennedy was listening carefully to what they said, to see whether it added anything to the testimony of the letter which we had already read about the activities of Alvarez.

"I may as well finish up what I have to say of the arrow-poison," he remarked at length. "Like so many barbarians, the Ainos from time immemorial have prepared virulent poisons with which they charged their weapons of the chase and warfare."

He tossed down on the table the short arrow which we had picked up in the curio-shop the day of our visit.

"There is one of their arrows," he added, "a crude, almost useless, clumsy affair. Merely to confirm what I had heard of their poison, I studied its tip, along that deep blood groove. The current information about such arrows is correct. Formerly the formula for the preparation of the poison, as in the case of most of the arrow-poisons of other tribes, such as *curare*, were known only to certain members and the secret was passed down from generation to generation as an heirloom, as it were. But those who have studied the thing now tell us that it has been proved that the active principle of this *annonoki* is the well-known aconite."

"It was a lucky chance, Kennedy," exclaimed a familiar voice in the doorway. "My men had already taken him into custody as he stepped off the train in the Grand Central early tonight. Here he is."

WE TURNED in surprise, to see Burke leading along our friend whom we had seen in the back-room of the greasy South Street saloon on the night when he had sought the gun-runners. It was Morelos, his crisp, curly hair rumpled as if he had not slept for days, but with the same piercing, defiant look about the eyes and cruel mouth.

"He's the toughest customer I've had in a long time," growled Burke. "I can't get a word out of him."

Morelos gazed about in silence. I verily believe that if Kennedy had ordered him shot the next moment he would have gone to his doom in the same defiant manner. His eye fell for the moment on the form of Señora Ruiz. He did not, of course, understand what it all meant. Yet for the moment there was just the flicker of a smile that played over his features at the sight of one of the hated Federals brought low, for whatever reason.

"Morelos," shot out Kennedy, without waiting a moment for the first surprise to wear off, "I have discovered what it was that caused the death of Madame Valcour."

Kennedy had thrust him at the only vulnerable spot. Instinctively the man's muscles tightened, he clenched his fists, two bright spots of passion blazed in his sallow cheeks, and he had to bite his lips to restrain the exclamation that nearly escaped him.

Even though he had not said a word, there was in his actions sufficient confirmation of the letters from the murdered adventuress which we had found in the hidden files of the South Street Junta.

Burke twisted his arm, to remind him that violence here was impossible. Morelos did not even wince. There was savage enough in him to force a contemptuous smile at the pain.

"You see," ejaculated Burke, "he—he's a devil!"

"Walter," said Kennedy quietly, more for its moral effect on Morelos than through any hope that he would get any information, "call up the police and see what the latest is about Sanchez and Alvarez since they left Bridgeport after they had traced Morelos there."

Morelos had evidently had some experience with the "third degree," for, beyond a momentary flash of the eye at the words which showed the extent of Kennedy's knowledge of his movements, he was to be betrayed into nothing more incriminating.

There was, of course, nothing to report as I left the telephone downstairs, and I was trying to frame up something that might further shake Morelos, if that were possible.

As I entered the room, however, Morelos for the moment seemed forgotten. All except Burke were bending over Señora Ruiz.

CHAPTER XVI

THE STOLEN SECRET

SEÑORA RUIZ had moved! A low exclamation from Kennedy had attracted the attention of those in the room.

"Now, Leslie," cried Craig, "steady—I rely on you."

The operation of the vividiffusion apparatus had been stopped, and deftly, working on his mettle as a surgeon, Dr. Leslie was joining up the several arteries and veins, as Kennedy prepared to stimulate the returning consciousness.

Scarcely the sound of a breath now disturbed the tense silence of the room as we watched the efforts to bring the unfortunate little dancer out from the effects of the stupor, now that the poison had been removed.

"Please—please—stand back," implored Kennedy. "She needs all the quiet and oxygen she can get!"

We drew back reluctantly, watching from a distance.

Evidently she heard dimly, was straining every effort to grasp the fleeting consciousness that had once slipped beyond her.

Kennedy leaned over and adjusted the pillows. There was just a flutter of her eyelids, as if she could feel and appreciate that some one was trying to do something for her.

"The bracelet," he whispered into her ear, cutting the words short in order to emphasize them and force them past the barrier of her clouded mind, "where did you get the bracelet?"

Her lips moved—but the sound died on them.

Kennedy repeated the question and strained his ears to catch the half-coherent words that struggled to the surface.

"They—gave it—to me," she whispered faintly.

"Gave it to you—for what?" he prompted.

"To use—if I should be—caught."

The continued questioning and the interval of time which gave outraged nature a chance to assert her recuperative powers were having their effects.

For a moment her eyes opened and she gave a glassy stare about, seeing nothing perhaps but the unfamiliar faces about her. At least it seemed to start a train of thought, though one which she could not control.

"Oh," she moaned, "I must tell nothing——"

"Nothing of what?" urged Kennedy, lest her own mental censorship should gain control and stop her tongue.

"Nothing until we meet——"

The effort was growing too much for her. Kennedy leaned over again. We followed anxiously. What if it should be lost now, when we had gone so far?

Hastily he seized a cloth and dipped it in some water near at hand, passed it over her face and fanned the fresh air to her fevered nostrils. The coolness of the water on her face and on her parched lips seemed momentarily to revive the fleeting brain processes.

"Meet where?" he urged persuasively.

Apparently her mind was making an effort to recall, for her own satisfaction, just where. Her lips moved in response to some uncontrolled motor-impulse.

"At Nichi's—this morning—at six."

The effort was too much for her. She repeated it, "Nichi—morning—six," as people will when they are vibrating on the border-line of anesthesia. Her lips moved, as she said the words over and over, but no sound came from them. She had lapsed again into the stupor of insensibility.

Suddenly Kennedy rose and with another look at her turned to us.

The spell seemed to have fallen for the moment on him. He was thinking aloud himself.

"Nichi's?" he repeated. "Why Nichi's? At six."

Mechanically he looked at his watch. We had been up all night. It was nearly that hour now. The sight of the watch, of something tangible, seemed to stimulate his mind. He snapped it back into his pocket as if it had been in some way instrumental in starting him on the right track.

"I have it," he almost shouted. "Nichi Moto's—because as far as they knew he was the only one not suspected. Nichi could get them tickets, disguises, everything that would enable a safe flight from the city."

It was at least a better hypothesis than any of the rest of us could furnish. As Kennedy reconsidered it, it seemed even more plausible.

"Come," he cried, "the curio-shop!"

He was hastily reaching for his coat which hung over the back of a chair, talking rapidly to the coroner as he did so.

"Leslie," he directed, "I can trust you to finish up here. You know better than I do what to do for her. Don't miss a word—either. Trust your own judgment—have her removed to a hospital if she seems strong enough—only have a nurse with her every moment—don't miss a thing—we may need it yet."

WE WERE quickly on the sidewalk before Sinclair's travel-stained car which had carried us successfully through so many tight places during the night. A passer-by looked back at us and shook his head, as if to say that we were a crowd of revelers who had turned night into day at the cabaret, much to his disgust. The morning air seemed to revive our drooping energies, however, and I sprang forward to crank the engine while Sinclair himself slid into the seat in front.

Mrs. Hawley, who had been tacitly accepted as one of us, seemed naturally to take the other front seat, and somehow Burke and Morelos, Kennedy and myself managed to squeeze into the rear.

"Nichi Moto?" I overheard Mrs. Hawley say to Sinclair. "He knew Valcour, Neumeyer—all. He used to come here to the cabaret, though I didn't know they ever went to the curio-shop."

"I don't know as they did," returned Sinclair, rounding the corner into the avenue and narrowly avoiding a milk-wagon.

WE STOPPED a few minutes later before the ramshackle row of buildings in which was the curio-shop, and I noted with some relief that on all sides they were surrounded by sky-scrapers that offered about as much chance of escape from the rear as the precipitate ledges of a cañon.

Kennedy bounded up to the door and unceremoniously broke the glass, preferring to take the consequences of a forcible entry to the loss of precious moments at such a crucial time.

Sure enough, seated in the alcove of the *tokonoma* were two roughly dressed men who looked as if they might have been newly arrived Italian immigrant-laborers. Kennedy's automatic covered them before they were fairly on their feet.

"Not a word!" he shouted as they began gesticulating and protesting. "I've been in this business long enough to read features—not clothes—Alvarez and Sanchez!"

Clever though the disguises were, including one lying on a chair, which was to have transformed the Señora into a Sicilian belle, it was indeed the men we sought—Alvarez and Sanchez.

For a moment they glared at Morelos, then suddenly at us as they realized that he, too, was in custody and had not been the informer who had led us there—although they had no reason, outside of first appearances, to suspect that.

A few hasty questions served to piece together at least a portion of the story, although these Government supporters were not more disposed to talk on important matters than was the Revolutionary leader, Morelos.

They had left their car over on Long

Island and had crept into the city by train through Brooklyn and then by the subway, fearing the spread of an alarm at the bridges and ferries. Then they had separated for the night, Alvarez seeking a cheap lodging-house, Sanchez an all-night restaurant, and Ruiz the Mexican cabaret.

As for means of escape in the morning, they had decided that the Japanese was best able to engineer that, and so they had agreed to meet at the earliest moment at the curio shop and make their way, if possible, out of the country by steerage.

Beyond that, even Kennedy, ably seconded by the bulldozing methods of Burke, was unable to extract anything.

Craig tried a new lead.

"You may be interested to know, Sanchez," he insinuated finally, "that, while I have a great respect for your mechanical ability, after going over that wire-tapping wireless at Westport, some one double-crossed even you. That outfit was put to a use in your own house for which you never intended it."

Sanchez gazed sullenly now at Kennedy, and I am sure would have throttled or poisoned him with equal pleasure.

"Some one used it to project wireless energy into the air," added Craig quietly.

Sanchez was not able to suppress a look of surprise which was genuine enough. I had been prepared for it and was gazing at Alvarez. He gave no sign of anything. Hastily I turned to Morelos, but Burke, who had been observing his prisoner closely, had evidently seen nothing, for he said nothing, and the slightest tremor on the part of Morelos would have called forth an entirely new catechizing from his captor.

"I'm telling you this," pursued Kennedy quietly, "for your own information. You didn't know anything about it. You—the clever schemer who could conceive of stealing the plans of the gyroscope air-ship from Colonel Sinclair, using the adventuress Valcour and a burglar's microphone—you, Sanchez, were a dupe. You made the fatal mistake of entrusting them to a woman who loved another."

FOR the first time Morelos allowed his fiery passions to get the upper hand. Kennedy had struck the right chord at last.

With an oath—and Mexican-Spanish is a picturesque language for profanity — he started forward at Sanchez. Quick as a tiger Burke seized him.

"I never had the plans!" ground out Morelos in baffled rage at the fate that had deprived him both of the adventuress who stood ready to dare everything for his love and of the secret which was to have made him the greatest power to be reckoned with in the war.

The outburst of Morelos had scarcely ruffled Kennedy. Gradually he was bringing out the truth of how the stolen plans had cursed every one who had stolen them, successively.

"Valcour having planned to steal them from you, Sanchez," Kennedy went on in even tone, "was the victim of still another. That other went further in diabolical ingenuity than even you had conceived. In a guise which you did not suspect, he accompanied you to Westport, installed his machine in the top of the house where he could tap the local electric power—and then destroyed the air-ship—made it seem a failure in order to discourage its use until his own government could make use of it. I came here expecting not only to find you, but the final evidence that will catch the real, arch-criminal in the case."

Kennedy paused long enough for us to catch every shade of expression on the faces he confronted, then added—

"I got my first hint of the true state of affairs from a letter that was sent from Mexico City, which I read without opening by a process that I have."

The air of mystery he threw about that simple phrase had its effect. He saw it and went on——

"I need not say anything about the remarkable attempts that are being made by some of your countrymen to form a compact by which you will allow the Japanese to gain a foothold both in Mexico and in South America.

"Those of you on both sides of the Pacific who are using this real or supposed relationship of Japan to the aboriginal races of Mexico as a pretext for establishing such a condition little realize with what a two-edged sword you are playing.

"Is the relationship true?" he proceeded. "I do not know. But I do know that if a scientific hypothesis is useful to politicians, they will use it with scientific certainty. Many today are endeavoring to drag anthropology and ethnology into politics. For the time being it may seem very clever. True or not," he concluded, "in this case, at least, it has ended in disaster for those very persons who thought it most clever."

All the stories I had read of the plotting and counter-plotting against the United States swept through my mind. I wondered just how much truth there was in them. That they were mere inventions seemed now inconceivable.

"Professor Neumeyer, scholar and gentleman, scarcely knew the depths to which some can descend to debauch science. While he was working on problems that were, it may be, tinged a little bit with the inevitable commercialism of the age, he knew nothing of the subtle forces at work under the surface—and the result was that he lost his life because he stood in the way of one whose avarice and race pride stopped at nothing."

KENNEDY stopped and turned full upon Alvarez.

"You, Alvarez!" he accused. "You thought you were playing an astute game. But even such masters of intrigue as you can be undone by those who are literally steeped in the fountain of intrigue in the Orient. Only modern science and American common sense in its application have foiled those who have beaten you, almost under your eyes, at your own game."

Kennedy had been rising to a higher and higher pitch of excitement as he proceeded with the untangling of this remarkable case. He had come at last to the point where he could finish it up with a flourish, like the crack of a whip.

"Unless I am totally mistaken," he shot out suddenly, "it was under the seductive influence of these supposed friends of yours—in this very alcove—that Valcour was inveigled, entertained with a cup or two of *saki*, drugged, robbed of the precious plans which she had determined to hand over to her real lover, poisoned and sent forth with just time enough to reach her hotel and die under circumstances that threw suspicion far away from Nichi Moto's curio-shop. Come—let us see if I am right! I have taken my time in this manner for a purpose."

Kennedy had sprung suddenly toward the stairs into the basement, up which we had seen Otaka come when he had brought us the *saki*. We stumbled down after him. The door at the foot of the steps was closed, but not locked.

Craig opened it cautiously. It was pitch dark in spite of the bright sunshine outside now. We entered gingerly.

We had not proceeded a step before, on the floor, I saw vaguely two dark heaps. My foot touched one of them. It yielded in a most uncanny way. I drew back in instinctive horror at the mere feel of it.

It was the body of a man!

KENNEDY struck a light, and, as we looked, we could discern within its circle of illumination a ghastly scene.

"*Hari-kiri!*" Craig ejaculated. "While we talked upstairs, they must have realized that they were discovered and that there was no way of escape!"

Nichi Moto and his Aino servant had committed suicide with the deadly arrow-poison which they had used to send two of their supposed friends to their death.

On the hearth of an old kitchen-range was a piece of porphyry, smashed into a thousand bits.

"It is the Pillar of Death!" exclaimed Kennedy simply.

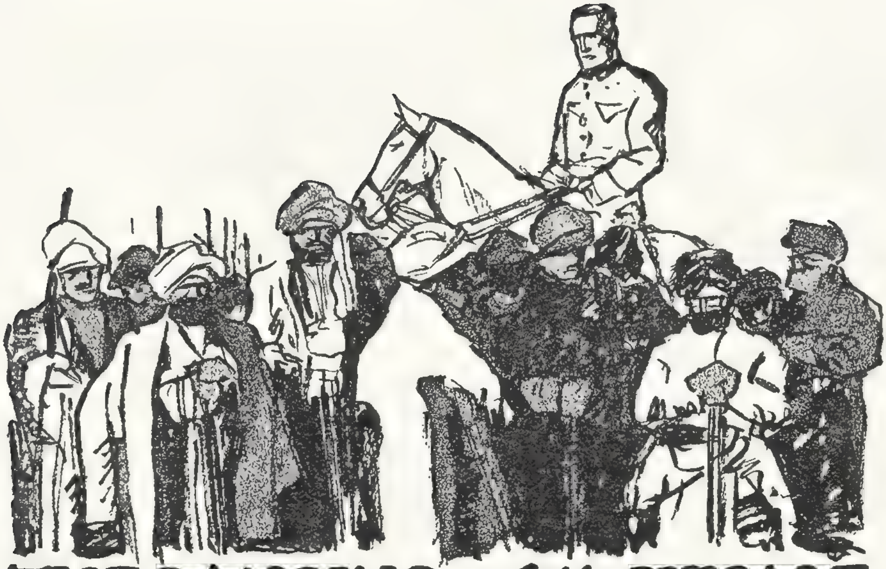
"Then the clue to the treasure is lost!" gasped Hattie Hawley, almost fainting at the sight of the tragedy.

Sinclair reached out and caught her.

"I don't care," he whispered, "I have found a greater treasure."

Craig had dropped down on his knees before the fireplace and was poking eagerly in a pile of charred paper and linen, forgetful of the murderers of Valcour for the plans and of Neumeyer for the buried treasure.

"Sinclair, your secret is safe," he cried. "The duplicate plans have been destroyed!"



THE LANCING *of the* WHALE

AN ADVENTURE OF DICK ANTHONY OF ARRAN

by TALBOT MUNDY

DICK ANTHONY surveyed a sun-baked plain, and knew his victory to be a Pyrrhic one; but, unselfconscious to the last degree, he happened to be chiefest of the men—in the true, tremendous meaning of that word—to whom danger was never more nor ever less than notice to put out their utmost. Russia had wronged him for her own ends; he had hit back hard at Russia, careless for his own wrongs, but mortified by Persia's, and now twice-running he had taught Cossacks how defeat feels; but in that minute, as he watched the stricken enemy slink off toward the sky-line and knew there would be vengeance later on, he no more feared the future than he thought of flinching from his own half-drilled rabble.

He was possessed with the same quiet piety that seems to have marked most great leaders. The only fear he ever seemed to know was that perhaps he might not do his duty; but he was no vain visionary; when he dreamed dreams and loosed imagination's rein, his habit was to work and fight until the dreams came true. He could recognize grim fact, and was too hard-headed to ignore it.

He admitted to himself now that his two quick victories within a week meant little more than two spur-marks on Russia's hide—very little more than two sure fighting-cues. Russia still held all the lines of communication with the outer world, and all the arteries of news; Russia had six million men to his three thousand. Russia had money—statesmen—influence—and all the hidden power of a huge political machine.

He had to stir himself if he was to save Persia from the Russian yoke! This last success was likely to bring men flocking to his standard; but the East is the East still, and the first reverse would set them deserting again in droves. Action, and only action—swift, unexpected and well-planned—could help him or Persia. But then he was a man of action, first and last.

"Back to the hills!" he ordered, shutting his binoculars away and gathering his charger's reins.

Russian dead and wounded lay scattered over two square miles of plain, and the walled city of Astrabad lay helpless for the taking; but shrewd calculation underlay his order for a prompt retreat. To have loosed his men now, with leave to plunder, would have wasted time and have forwarded no cause but Russia's. In the end he believed that his appeal would lie to the outer world, and he meant to give that world no good excuse for listening to Russia's lies about brigands in North Persia and the dire consequent necessity for Cossacks to protect foreigners and foreign country.

His ragged line stood still gazing in wonder at him in the flush of his new success, gaping belief, now, more than ever of Usbeg Ali Khan's wild story, that made him Alexander of Macedon reincarnated. But he cantered down among the spaced-out companies, letting the sunlight flash along the blade of his strange jeweled claymore, and his voice was like the cracking of great whips, as he made his will known, his seat in the saddle that of a man who is obeyed.

"Back!" he ordered. "Back to your hills again!"

"Plunder!" they murmured. "Let us loot the city first!"

They only asked leave to do what Cossacks in their place would probably have done without asking leave at all and what Persians have always done since history evolved from fable; they asked blood for blood—loot for loot—vengeance for vengeance—payment for ravished homes. And they were backed in their demand by Usbeg Ali Khan, the Afghan gentleman-adventurer, who thought no victory complete without its logical corollary.

"Let them loot, *bahadur!*" he advised, riding up to Dick's side. "What other payment have they for their services? Let them pay themselves, as the custom is; then, exact full credit for it, and work them the harder afterwards!"

Dick wheeled on him, spinning his big horse in one of those swift movements that were as disconcerting as they were characteristic. For a moment two chargers pawed the air, and Usbeg Ali Khan believed his hour had come, for Dick's eyes gleamed strangely and his jaw was set hard; the Afghan had not quite learned yet to recognize the sign of reached decision; he mistook it for cold anger on occasion.

"I made you second-in-command! What are you doing here? Take the left wing and answer for your men's behavior! Join your command, sir!"

He made a sweeping gesture with his claymore toward a half-mile line of men, and his words were loud and clear enough for half of them to hear, for his voice crashed and reverberated when he had roused himself for action.

"The whole line will retire!" he thundered. "Usbeg Ali Khan will lead the rear-guard!"

Without another word he spurred to the far end of the other wing where his seven hundred horsemen were drawn up and Andry Macdougal leaned, swearing soft, endearing oaths at the machine-gun. The thing had answered to the big man's touch that dawn like magic, dealing death by wholesale, so—since his heart was like a little child's in most things—he all but wept his admiration for the thing.

"Where awa'?" called Andry. "Where awa', Mr. Dicky?"

Dick reined in, and the huge man laid a hand on the charger's withers.

"Back to the hills, Andry. Are your men in hand?"

"Ou-aye!"

The great, grim Scotsman turned to look at what he called his "thirty yoke o' humans," and they seemed to come to life beneath his gaze.

"Man—Mr. Dicky—they think I'm the de'il—an' when I luke at yon dead Roosians I'm no' sae verra sure the chiels are no' recht! They'll do what I say or I'll prove I'm a de'il, an' they ken that verra weel! Aye! They're certainly in han'!"

"Then lead the way! Lead off with your gun! Back along the way we came!"

"But—Mr. Dicky——"

"What?"

Dick's eyebrows—generally level and at rest—began to rise impatiently. When a man knew the meaning of discipline, he seldom cared to accept less than the real, quick, ready thing from him.

"About Marie——?"

"Marie who?"

"Man! Her that's waitin'-wumman on the Princess yonder!"

Dick scowled at the horizon. A cloud of dark dust curled and eddied above a low hill and stampeding Cossacks; beyond the cloud, he knew, was the Princess who had interfered and played with him, until he was outlaw who had once been proud Scots gentleman. It was only human to connect the Princess and her maid together in one comprehensive loathing, and to forget for the moment that the maid had fallen victim to Andry's gargoyle charms—that she loved the huge man—and that she had already given proof of her devotion.

"She's helped us, Mr. Dicky, an' she'll help again. We ought to send a mon to keep in touch wi' her—some lad wi' brains, who'd spy an' run messages."

"No," said Dick, smiling as he mentally compared the gnarled hard-bitten six-feet five beside him with the little French maid's inches. He was no ladies' man, whatever Andry might be. "If she loves you, she'll prove it. She'll either come to you or send a message. We'll put her affections to the test. Get your gun away!"

"Na-na! She's affectionate enough!" the giant grumbled. "She's no at a' like the Jezebel her mistress!"

"Did you hear my order?"

"Ay! Stan' by y'r traces, there! Tak' hold!"

Sixty tired men sprang from the ground to do his bidding instantly, and Dick rode on to where all the Russian reserve ammunition lay piled on commissariat-wagons, horsed from the stables of Russian officers.

"Forward!" he ordered, pointing to the hills; and the cavalcade began to move.

* * *

AT THE far end of the other wing Usbeg Ali swallowed his own thoughts of plunder and forced Dick's will on men whose ideal might be Persia liberated, but whose immediate yearning, like his own, was for the loot in Astrabad bazaars. His especial choice would have been leave to sack the treasury, and it went hard with him to turn his back on the thirty-foot-high wall that frowned less than two miles away; yet it seemed to him that there was too much of the hand of Allah in Dick's destiny for him to forget discipline and glut his own desire.

"*Bismillah!*" he muttered in his beard. "The fellow strokes his stubborn chin, looks up once to heaven, and then knows what to do! I tell tales of him that I invented and the tales prove true ones! I prophesy about him, and the prophecies come true! Who am I, that I should doubt the hand of Allah! Nay—I am a soldier, and I have my orders!"

He rode like a thunderbolt, once up and once again down the line, shouting for close order; and since close order presaged movement of some kind they obeyed him readily enough.

"Loot!" they began to murmur. "Lead us to the loot!"

"Persians!" he thundered at them. "Who is afraid?"

No Persian ever will admit he is afraid, until he thinks that he will gain by the admission. No one answered him. They all grinned.

"Has not every word of mine come true? Said I not that this Dee-k-Anthonee is the Great Iskander born again at Allah's bidding? Is he not? Said I not that he carries in his fist the Great Iskander's sword? Does he not? Saw any—ever—such a sword, with such a jewel in its hilt? Said I not that Cossacks would melt away before him as sheep before a wolf? And did they not? Where are the Cossacks? Run they not yonder? Saw any of you—or your fathers—ever—Cossacks running away before? Who is afraid to follow to another, greater victory?"

They looked from left to right, and from right to left again. They looked behind them, to where their dead and wounded lay in a little cluster; and they looked in front, at the Russian dead and wounded scattered about the plain—twenty or thirty to their one. Away to their right, behind them, they could see Dick Anthony lead off in the direction of the hills, and it seemed to them that they were being offered choice between obedience and whatever its opposite might prove to be.

A company commander—one of Usbeg Ali's seven loyal Afghans—sensed the indecision and gave tongue to his own thought on the matter.

"*Zindabad Dee-k-Anthonee Shah!*" he yelled.

That yell brought memories of black nights in the mountains, when they had chosen Dick by acclamation as their leader, had sworn obedience to him, and had learned from him a little of the naked honesty that was his creed. Not even the East forgets so suddenly its oath of loyalty or the memories rekindled by a rallying-cry.

"*Zindabad Dee-k-Anthonee Shah!*" they chorused; and from Dick's contingent in the distance came an echoing shout, yelled at the limit of enthusiastic lungs. Where

Dick was, there was never any doubt about men's sentiment; it was only where his voice did not reach and he was not visible that they thought of disobedience.

"In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, I guarantee another victory!" roared Usbeg Ali, careless of promises, so that the moment was his own. "There will be another, greater battle, and plunder that surpasses yonder at the rate of ten to one! Gather up the wounded! Gather up the dead! Follow Dee-k-Anthonee! Back to the hills now, where new plans are cooking! Forward! March!"

There was still a little murmuring. From the first, these had been half-hearted men; these were they who had lagged on the long march down from the mountaintop, and had followed Dick's swift-moving force more with a view to picking up the jettison, that an army in a hurry always scatters in its wake, than because they had much stomach for campaigning in his strenuous way. It had suited Dick to confirm his judgment of Usbeg Ali Khan by trusting him to get these laggards moving; also, it had suited him to lead away his best men first, and save them from contamination; but to the left-behind it looked as if he had bade them follow because he knew he could not make them lead.

"Loot!" yelled a tattered rifleman. "Let us loot the city and then follow!"

But a kick from Usbeg Ali's toe rooted the man's front teeth out, and his wheeling charger sent the fellow stumbling from the ranks.

"Where are my own men? Who are my men?" thundered Usbeg Ali.

All the captains of companies, and their subordinates, were his. Either they were Afghans who had followed him through Asia, from personal regard and hope of fighting, or they were Persians whom he had promoted, and who therefore honored him. They were lustful for loot as he, or anybody, but the contagion of his soldier-spirit seized them, and they served him now almost before the challenge left his lips. They sprang into life and spurred along the line, upbraiding — shouting — swearing — promising—encouraging — praising—calling down God's judgment on all unbelievers. In five minutes more the dead and wounded had been gathered up; the line was in fours, and moving.

"Sons of unbelieving mothers!" Usbeg Ali roared at them. "Gentiles! See—ye offspring of deserting Cossacks, without any honor, and devoid of sense of shame! Yonder, in front of us march Persians—true Persians!"

He pointed to where the sunrays lit on Andry Macdougal's machine-gun—brighter now than ever it had been before the Cossacks lost it. He pointed to where Russian wagons trailed, loaded with Russian ammunition, headed for the hills and rear-guarded by Dick's horsemen.

"Yonder march true-believers! Yonder go the men whom Dee-k-Anthonee has chosen for his own! Would ye stay behind, like little dirty jackals whimpering around the city dunghills? Even the Cossacks have a little honor! Have ye none?"

Shame seized them. They began to march with a will, in silent earnest. They began to try to prove themselves as good or better than the men ahead, and no whit behind them in their loyalty to Dick. They began to overtake the column; and soon Dick Anthony saw fit to notice them. He sent a messenger to Usbeg Ali and, aloud, the horseman shouted a demand for more speed; but under his breath he assured the Afghan he might take his time.

"Dee-k-Anthonee says, 'Flatter them!' He needs them fit and willing for a certain service!" the man whispered.

So, gradually Usbeg Ali changed his tone, and with a soldier's tongue, that can be far more cunning than a courtier's in its own rough way, he worked hard to put them in a good conceit. By the time they reached the foothills they were no better soldiers than they had been but they had begun to think themselves each a young Napoleon, with a field-marshal's baton in his haversack.

Dick halted where the foothills rose abruptly from the level land, and the horses could no longer drag the heavy wagons fast enough to keep up with climbing infantry. There on a sloping hillside, facing another hill and out of sight of Astrabad, they held a solemn burying of dead. At one end of the long, wide trench they dug, Dick stood bareheaded, waiting while the Moslem prayers were said; and then the parting volleys rattled over Persians who had never been so honored while they lived.

"Who are we, that he should treat our dead thus?" they wondered, Persian-wise disparaging the compliment while gloating secretly.

"Ha! This is a new rule, and a better one! Since the Great Iskander there was never such a man as this! He knows what is meet, and makes it so!"

When the echo of the parting volleys had died down, even the leg-weary rear-guard were in a mood for anything; and Dick lost no time, nor any single whisp of an advantage that circumstance had blown his way. His treatment of the dead had been sincere, as his every single act was always; but he knew the value of impressions on the Oriental mind and had no least compunction about turning them to use.

He ordered the wounded taken from the wagons where they lay on the cartridge-boxes. He ordered bough-litters made for them, and told off carriers. Next, out came the cartridge-boxes, and he served out two hundred rounds a man. There were thousands on thousands of rounds left over, and he had them packed on the horses. Then he ordered:

"Haul the wagons by hand along that ridge! Draw them up in line!"

They obeyed him, wondering. In full view of the distant city they arranged a barricade of wagons, overturning them and locking each to each until the whole was like a wall.

"Now, guard them for me until my return!" Dick ordered, riding down to where the rear-guard watched inquisitively. Usbeg Ali stared wide-eyed, but Dick bade him lead the advance-guard now, straight up toward the mountains.

"Lead off with the horse!" he ordered. "Throw out a screen ahead and on either flank. Wait for me unless I have caught up before you reach the fifth mile."

"But, *bahadur*——"

"What?"

"Listen! Burn those wagons!" urged the Afghan. "They are no use—not any use—they are a target and a hindrance—nothing more!"

"They are more use than a little!" answered Dick. "My whole plan hinges on them."

Dick shut his lips tight in a way that Usbeg Ali was beginning now to recognize for the abrupt, blunt end of argument. He saluted and rode away.

"Now! 'Tention! Listen!"

They had been leaning on their rifles, but the crack and resonance Dick gave his words brought them up standing like drilled men.

"Yonder in Astrabad there are not many Russians left, but those we have just worsted may rally and return. They are likely to. I am going on, a day's march from here. If you are attacked, you may send a man to warn me. Meanwhile you—Yussuf Ali—command this rear-guard. Stand here, and defend this position and these wagons until I come back. Don't trouble to conceal yourselves. Light fires tonight; let the Russians know where you are; and the best way to avoid attack will be to make the Russians think you are more numerous than you are. Fire on their patrols, should they send any; but don't dare warn me that you need help unless you are outnumbered! If I find you here on my return, good! But deserters from this post will be treated, wherever found, as traitors should be treated! You have seen your dead honored! I am ready to honor living men when they deserve it! To the wagons—forward—march!"

FIVE minutes later he left them digging trenches with whatever tools they could improvise, and he rode away with no doubt in his mind that they would stay there. In the first place, Yussuf Ali was one of Usbeg Ali's trusted men, and second only to that arch-adventurer in soldier qualities. Then, too, it had been one thing in the flush of victory to gaze and yearn at close quarters; it was another now to lie and watch Astrabad from a distance, leg-weary and in expectation of attack. Nothing was more certain than that they would see the rallying Cossack regiments return and enter the city; nor were they likely to desert then—to scatter and risk piecemeal Cossack vengeance; they knew that sort of Hell's delight too well. They were likely to recognize, when they were left alone to think, where, obeying whose orders, they were safest.

"Forward!" ordered Dick, riding to the head of the remaining infantry.

"Rest here for the night!" they begged him. "We are weary men! We have fought and won a battle! Let it be the Cossacks' turn to march sore-footed!"

"Aye!" put in Andry, leaving his machine-gun to lend weight and height to the argument. "I'm a girt, strang, hefty mon ma'sel, Mr. Dicky, but *I'm* weary; what mus' *they* be?"

"Forward!" ordered Dick relentlessly, and led the way.

He went through no time-dusty foolishness of getting off his horse to walk and lead them. He was there, so it seemed to him, to lend them all he had of skill, and will, and strength; and he could do that best if he were fresh at the farther end. He was right; for had he walked, to suffer with them as some leaders would have done, those men of Persia—where neither man nor word nor motive had ever yet been rude—would have judged him an actor. As it was, they were slowly finding out that his words and actions stirred their hearts because the truth lay under them; each thing he did, and word he spoke was an expression of what he thought right, and therefore best, calling for neither excuse nor explanation. To them it would have seemed a sign of weakness to dismount and walk. To him it would have been a stupid waste of strength.

As usual, his mere presence put spirit in them, and the tired men tramped and climbed behind him with a will. Andry, looking back past his machine-gun to the ant-like column toiling up-hill, recalled a picture of Highlanders returning from a foray that had hung above his mother's mantel in the cottage on the Isle of Arran. Haunted by the memory of a little French maid's face that he had held between his great gnarled hands and kissed, his softer side was uppermost and maudlin sentiment met martial on common ground. There was a man beside him, who sweated under the leather bag, that held all Dick's wardrobe. Andry grabbed the bag, and opened it.

Out came Dick's bagpipes; Andry's cheeks bulged outwards and his temples took a purple hue as the drones began to hum their weird inharmony. Then, in a minute, the long straggling line picked up its feet and tried, in spite of rocks, to keep step to a tune to which forced marches have been made times without number.

Hie upon Hielan's
An' low upon Tay,
Bonny George Campbell
Rode out on a day.

Tired leg-muscles grew limber, and weary wills awoke as if by magic. Magic it was—the mad, soul-stirring lilt and laugh of Highland music that makes men forget themselves and tingle only for a hand in happenings. It lifted them; it drew them, till the gorges echoed to the thunder of their coming, and the birds sped scared away.

Up, up Dick led and Andry lured with tunes; and whatever goad—of instinct, intuition, information, or mere whim—was driving him, Dick said nothing and answered no questions. Not even when they came on the advance-guard, waiting for them on a plateau, and Usbeg Ali Khan rode back to report the trail all clear, would Dick give any details of his plan.

"*Bahadur*," said Usbeg Ali, "none can catch us. These men came down-hill by forced marches, and fought hard; why race them up-hill again?"

"I won't!" said Dick.

True to his word, Dick led the way now to the right instead of upward. Not for an instant did he slacken pace, but leaving Usbeg Ali to bring along the infantry, he hurried the advance-guard along hill-sides.

"Why hurry?" asked Usbeg Ali, spurring after him, determined to get to the bottom of the reason for such haste. "The men are faint. There is a limit to what men can do! What is the danger now, *bahadur?*"

"An army-corps at least! Two perhaps!"

"Where?"

"Over the Russo-Persian border!" answered Dick.

"*Bahadur*, that may be. One army-corps might be enough to ring us 'round and bring us to bay, even in such a mountain range as this; but even its cavalry could not come up with us for a week or two! An army-corps moves like a serpent on its belly, slowly and by fits and starts. It is the pace that kills, *bahadur!*"

Dick, spurring his horse up a narrow path between two rocks, turned his head and smiled.

"Killing and war go hand-in-hand!" he answered quietly.

"*Bismillah!*" swore the Afghan. "We have all too few men, and can spare none!"

"Then, we mustn't spare the Russians!" answered Dick hurrying on.

"Now, Allah give me understanding!" Usbeg Ali swore into his black beard and drew rein. He waited until the head of the main body had caught up with him, and one of his loyal seven drew aside to ask him questions.

"What is it, sahib? What is his plan?

At this pace there will soon be none to follow!

The music draws them on, and curiosity; but they are weary. It is all too swift and fierce! They will begin to desert in droves, and who can stop them? Then, when the hunting begins in earnest and the Cossacks ring him 'round——"

"May I be there!" laughed Usbeg Ali. "I would liefer die at his side than own all Russia! Forward! Forward!" he shouted, riding down the line to urge them. "Forward to more fighting!"

Andry's cheeks ached, and the sweat ran down his purple face in streams, but he played on manfully, stumbling over stones and stopping every now and then to lend his great shoulder to a wheel and help his tired gun-team. He played and watched, played and watched until he found the tune they seemed to like best; then he played that all the time:

O Logie o' Buchan, O Logie the laird!
They ha'e ta'en awa' Jamie that delved i' the yard,
  Wha played on the pipe an' the viol sae sma',
  They hae ta'en awa' Jamie, the flower o' them a'!
He said, Think na lang, lassie, though I gang awa';
He said, Think na lang, lassie, though I gang awa';
  For Simmer is comin', cauld Winter's awa',
  An' I'll come an' see thee in spite o' them a'!

The tune was not Persian, and no spark of Persian sentiment was in the words; but possibly the big man's thoughts about the maid, whose lips he longed to kiss again, lent pathos to the simple tune and rendered it acceptable to all who heard.

The Persians marched to it like men of iron, and before the sun was much more than half-way on his journey downward to the Western skyline they had come within sight of a cliff that overhung the plain.

Dick called a halt at last, when they reached the brow of it, and pointed to a fringe of trees behind which they might lie and rest.

"No camp-fires, now! No watch-fires tonight! No noise! Eat your rations cold and sleep where you lie!" he ordered.

"*Bahadur*, I am second-in-command; may I not know the secret?" asked Usbeg Ali. "Am I likely to betray a confidence?"

Dick smiled. He well knew the Afghan's loyalty. But he knew too who had told those utterly amazing tales about Iskander come to life again, and he judged that such poetical imagination would be better not too freely fed. An oath was an oath, and the Afghan could keep one; but silence had ever been Dick's favorite weapon; loud words and a little boasting were the seasoning of war to Usbeg Ali. The Afghan could make songs, and sing them in Persian, that would set a whole army by the ears without divulging anything. Dick wanted his army quiet—incurious—at rest.

"There's no secret, Usbeg Ali. I've got suspicions by dawn I'll know the truth. Help me pick watchmen now! Use all your wits—we need eyes, ears, and silence!"

Together they walked in and out among the men, watching them munch dry corn and make ready to sleep the night through; and now the wisdom, in at least one way of Dick's forced marching was apparent. It was plain that he considered secrecy as to his present whereabouts highly important; but the man who had said there were no traitors, even in that hard-marching host, would have been laughed at. There are always traitors in the East. Disappointed of their loot that morning, there were gentry with him who under other circumstances would have loved an opportunity to go over to the Russians with information of Dick's whereabouts that would be worth a price. But he had tired them utterly, both horse and man. Even the most discontented were glad to lie down where he bade them lie, and sleep where he let them sleep.

Not even gold would have tempted them to move before they were compelled. There was no small-talk passing between companies—no running here and there to interchange ideas. They lay and munched their corn under the nodding trees, rejoicing in the cool, while below them on the plain the heat-haze shimmered and kites circled above dust-whirls, or swooped to gorge. Soon, most of them fell asleep, to dream of peace, and plenty, and green pastures.

Then, as Gideon did once in the Bible-story, Dick took steps to choose a handful from his host, on whom he could depend. He and Usbeg walked here and there, here and there, in and out among the companies, looking for men whose eyes were bright still, and who were not too tired to answer jest with jest. Traitors make poor and unready jesters as a rule.

"Where is thy shame?" demanded Usbeg

Ali of a man who washed his trousers in a brook and displayed more anatomy than cities would consider legal.

"Lent to the Cossacks—they had need of it!" the fellow laughed.

"Take that one, *bahadur!*" advised Usbeg Ali, and Dick beckoned to him.

"Thou!" called Dick to another one who grubbed himself a shallow trench in which to lie. "What buriest thou?"

"My share of the loot!" the fellow answered.

"Come!" said Dick. "I'll use you."

It took them two hours to pick a hundred and fifty men; but at last they had three fifty-man platoons to take the strain in turn; and then they pushed a living fringe far forward, beyond the low foothills to the hot plain. Dick posted them, though Usbeg Ali went with him to see, and Usbeg Ali listened to the orders that he gave; but the Afghan learned little.

"Now for the closest watch that ever army kept!" commanded Dick. "The man caught nodding, dies! The first man to get information wins promotion on the spot! I'm short of good sergeants!"

He had learned the trick of managing his Persians. A whip behind, spurs at each flank, and reward held out ahead are good for horse and man—West and East—cultured and uncultured—leader and led; but they are particularly useful south of Alexandria, or east of the Levant. Dick's earlier qualms—that all good men must have when first called on to be drastic—had gone, and though he loved liberty more passionately now than ever in his life, he understood that to get general efficiency he must deal ruthlessly with individual offenders. By nature he was just —by training quick—by instinct always wide-eyed, on the watch for what was good and right, and instant to acknowledge it; they had found that out. Above all they had found him that rarest of all rare things in the East, a man of his word; so they believed him when he threatened them, and when he promised them reward they knew it was a real prize that they might strive for with assurance.

"We will watch as the night-birds watch for mice!" they promised.

"Two hours!" said Dick.

"Two hours, and then relief for four—then, two hours' watch again!"

When the last fixed-post had been attended to, he and Usbeg Ali walked back through gathering gloom to the foot of the over-hanging cliff, where Dick had ordered a grass bed made for himself, raised on four cleft sticks.

"I'm going to sleep here," he said, "where they can find me quickly. I've a lucky trick of taking sleep in concentrated doses, by ten minutes at a time—learned it small-boat sailing in the Kyles of Bute."

"A God-given trick, *bahadur!* Praise Him who gave!"

"You haven't slept, to my knowledge, for two nights."

"I am a soldier—!"

"And a most uncommon good one, Usbeg Ali!——"

"Sahib, I——"

"Don't interrupt! Go up to where the men lie; sleep until dawn!"

"Sahib, I——"

"It is an order, Usbeg Ali!"

So the Afghan went, regretfully—almost resentfully—yet sore-eyed from long wakefulness; and soon his snores sang second to Andry Macdougal's rasping salutation of the sleep-god. The whole host was sleeping almost before the sun went under, and none but the shadow-lurking outposts saw four horsemen, one by one, go racing past along the plain at chance, uncertain intervals.

Dick's orders were for silence and no attempt was made to shoot the gallopers; three slipped by untouched. So the fourth man, riding within sound of the third's hoof-thunder, gathered confidence. He rode full pelt into a trap; they tripped his horse with a pegged rope, and pounced on him to strip him, and whether he broke his neck in falling or they broke it for him they reported him to Dick as dead. When they had torn every strip of clothing from his body they discovered a letter tucked into his sock, and hurried to Dick with it, quarreling while they ran as to who of them had earned reward. Dick—leaping from his bed before they were within ten yards of him—promoted all five instantly.

Then he struck match after match, and burned his fingers in his eagerness to read the message, chuckling to himself and thanking the god of good adventurers because he knew enough Russian to understand the fifty words scrawled on a piece of unofficial paper. No need of an interpreter! No one to share the news! Nobody, then, to warn the Russians! For the hundredth time his trick of keeping silent had served him well! For the dozenth time Usbeg Ali Khan, who would have scoffed at the suggestion, would wonder at the subsequent event! Men who would have almost surely feared to venture had he hinted at his aim, would thunder in his wake at dawn, and trust him well enough to follow later, on the staggering, amazing trail he meant to tackle next.

"Only Russia—of all the nations in the world—could have made such a dismal mess of things!" he told himself. "I suppose only Russia could afford it!" he added as an afterthought.

AT DAWN, when the drifting grayish mists were rising to proclaim the hour of prayer, he found Usbeg Ali Khan—adventurer, idealist, and true-believer—rising from a prayer-mat, facing Mecca.

"Look!" said Dick, pointing through a rift in the mist to the plain below.

"At what, *bahadur?*"

"Look!"

Something moved, slowly, like a darker bank of mist amid the rest—half a thousand feet below, and ten miles distant—noiseless apparently; and yet there was a hint of something that suggested thunder.

"*Allah!*" said the Afghan.

"See 'em?"

"By the blood of Allah's prophet!" said the Afghan, "Guns!"

"And we need artillery!" said Dick.

"*Bahadur——!*"

"I guessed it, Usbeg Ali—wasn't sure. Now, hurry! Get word around among the men to make no noise—not a sound! I'm going down to warn the outposts to make sure no traitor gets away to warn the Russians. Look! They've been traveling since midnight—they're halting for breakfast!"

"*Bahadur,*" said Usbeg Ali, "Allah fights on the right side—always! It was Allah made me love artillery!"

"In a few hours we will have guns!" answered Dick.

II

NEVER, probably, since in the dawn of ages Asia first began to writhe under the hates and loves, the devilish desires and passion-bred wars of individuals, had the hot plains outside Astrabad seen fury such as rent the Princess Olga Karageorgovich while Dick's little army wound its way toward the hills.

The Cossacks—peppered into a retreat by Andry's machine-gun—routed by Dick's charge—volleyed at until they dared not turn to look at what did, or did not pursue them—raced by her beyond control or prospect of it.

"Cowards!" she screamed. "Curs!"

Spurring in among them, spitting scorn and screeching terrible, unfeminine abuse, she galloped to the low hill Dick had pointed out to her but twenty minutes gone, and toward which the men were now stampeding. Her horse was made frantic by the passion that exuded from her as lightning flickers from the storm-clouds. She was feeling still the pressure of Dick's iron arm around her waist. It seemed to burn like a red-hot band. While he had held her on his horse she loved him—god of lost women, how she loved him! When he set her on another horse, and rode away, her hot she-tiger love turned into hate at last, and her teeth chattered at the thought of how she had risked authority, liberty, life itself for him.

She did not stop to remember that Dick had never sought her help, or accepted even her acquaintance without protest. It was nothing to her, had no bearing on the case, that she had interfered with him, tricked him, ruined him, and thrust herself on him uninvited. She only hated him, and vowed that she would teach that proud Scots gentleman the difference between help from her and hindrance—between her friendship and her enmity—between her love that he had scorned and the full flood of her hate that he had brought down on himself.

She looked around her, wild but yet unblinded by her rage, and took in the situation with a swift understanding that would have done credit to a war-scarred veteran. She saw a Cossack officer, half-way up the rising ground, doing his level best to rally the fleeing men. She rode to him—bumped her horse into him. He had a knout in his hand, as many Russian officers still do have, whatever printed regulations and the censored news may say.

"Give it to me!" she demanded; and he hesitated.

So she leaned out of the saddle and

snatched it from him, spat at him, called him poltroon, and then—bewitching, hate-propelled, amazing—charged into the middle of the tide of men and lashed at them left and right. Her chestnut hair was down, and her helmet off; her eyes blazed like living fires and her parted lips emitted hisses that were thoughts too savage to take shape. She might have been Medusa; and there came a man—the officer supposed to be commanding—who felt his heart turn to stone—cold, crumbling chalk—at sight of her.

"Ha!" she screamed at him. "Here comes the fellow who knew better!"

A little fat, a little gray above and behind the ears, he tramped in tight riding-boots behind his men, purple-faced and hoarse from efforts to control the uncontrollable. Her order had been not to attack Dick Anthony; he had over-ridden it. She—for her own ends as well as Russia's—had desired Dick hunted, but not caught or killed; he—blaming her for previous disaster—had decided to attack, and to keep to himself the credit for Dick's capture or his death. He had defied her secret power—had snapped his fingers at her telegrams from Petersburg that gave her all authority beyond the Atrak River; and now he grew paler as he faced his Nemesis.

"Here comes the man who planned this business!" she jeered. "Cossacks! Seize him! Make him prisoner! Arrest the gray-haired imbecile! He led you into this shambles in the teeth of orders! Seize him!"

None listened to her, though the men who ran took care to avoid her flicking whip-lash. None took any notice of the Colonel, recovering his breath and fingering the automatic pistol at his belt. He stood figuring his chances—his word against her word, his record against her secret influence, his honest purpose against her sheer wickedness.

"Arrest him!" she screamed. "I will have him court-martialed! He shall pay for this in full!"

But they were in no mood to listen to a woman; strong men had failed to check their course. She was young; she looked young, even in her fury; age had not won respect from them that day. They hurried past her, and the Colonel waited, still fingering the pistol. She rode toward him, and her knout cracked as she came. He drew the pistol, just as two lieutenants stopped running, caught sight of the impending duel, and hurried to intercede. She saw them. Wild-eyed, with an oath that would have made a common soldier wince, she flogged her horse and rode at him; but as she came he turned the pistol muzzle upward, pressed it underneath his chin, and fired.

Balked of her first intent, and so wilder yet, she flogged his dead body, cutting weals across the livid face. She snatched at her horse to try and make him trample on the corpse; but, true to instinct, each time the brute came to it he jumped or swerved aside, and she wrenched his jaw savagely, swinging him back to try again, flogging like a mad she-devil. She lashed at the corpse and her horse until the two lieutenants were nearly close enough to interfere; then she rode off with a laugh after the routed Cossacks, and began the savagest lone-handed fight one woman ever entered on.

She turned them, though it took two hours. She brought them to a halt at last—rallied them—faced them about—and led them back; and how she did it, only she knew. There were men behind her when she came, whose faces streamed blood where her whip-lash had descended; there was an officer whose blood ran in his eyes. They followed her like beaten dogs, tramping in fours as if in leash, too dazed and frightened to remember anything, or to do anything but obey her dumbly and march numbly at her bidding, back to Astrabad. For the second time within a week shamed Russian soldiers were to enter through the city-gate and march under the eye of the inhabitants.

Her French maid—the little maid who had succumbed to Andry's Gargantuan charms—rode behind the men, too frightened to let her mistress see her if it could be helped, yet much too scared to ride away. She was sobbing—sobbing for her grim, tremendous Andry, who would have put a great iron arm around her and would have told her not to "fash hersel'." She would have ridden into Hell smiling behind Andry; but to ride into Astrabad again behind the Princess was another matter, and she rode in tears.

They were challenged—brought to a halt outside the gate. None but Olga Karageorgovich could have gained admission without fighting, for the barracks were all burning and the city's inhabitants were up in arms. Once in the city, none but she could have led men unmolested through the streets; for with Dick's good leave, the Persians had already looted every stick of Russian property that could be found, and the sight of fire—the very name of plunder—had aroused them. They were in no mood to knuckle under any more to Cossack tyranny.

But she said, "Open!" And they opened. She said, "Forward!" And the Cossacks trudged in unattacked!

Two-thirds of the officers were dead, and the remainder were too cowed and spent to think of disputing her usurped command. They knew that she had authority from somewhere, and of some kind; and Russians are taught early in official life not to question orders from above, whoever hands them on. They had heard of the Okhrana, that gives orders to the Czar; they suspected she was of that secret government. They guessed that her voice — her account of things, and no one else's—would be listened to in Russia, where the secret strings are pulled. It seemed better to them to march sullenly beside their men, and not call attention to themselves.

"Open!" she ordered; and the gate swung wide. Harridan, more beautiful than even their Moslem dreams of *houris* in Mohammed's paradise, astride like a man, but in very feminine attire, knout-armed, and the knout's lash bloody, helmetless, her hair streaming over her charger's flanks in five-foot-long chestnut streams, obeyed — by men who two hours gone were utterly beyond obedience—almost a girl in years, but one whose eyes blazed and whose soft red lips moved silently in a rage too wild for words, that most un-Persian of all women dazed the lean riflemen who held the gate, appalled them, refilled them with fear of Russia and a quick resolve to run no risks.

So she rode in at the head of little more than two half-regiments, reckless of the dead and dying on the plain outside and thoughtful only of Russia's grip that must be reclenched on Northern Persia. Gone was her passion for Dick Anthony—gone up in a blaze of anger, and replaced by a hate for him that was inhuman in its devilish determination. Gone was the thought of serving Dick by playing the Okhrana false—gone any hope of seeing him a king.

She wanted him dead now—a dead, disfigured Dick whom she could spurn and spit on. In her imagination she could see him dead—still proud, still smiling that disdainful, resourceful smile of his; and she knotted up her fingers in an ecstacy of wickedness, gloating over the thought of how her whip would slice the smile into red unrecognition.

Not a minute did she waste. The wires were down and the Caspian cables cut; she had the field all clear, and none now would be likely to oppose her orders. She seized new buildings for the Cossacks, raided the bazaars and seized an ample store of food, arrested twenty of the leading citizens, and whipped them—set Astrabad a-thunder with the preparation for new, resolute beginnings.

At first she imagined Dick would attack the city, and she started to fortify the place. The flogged inhabitants soon brought out cartridges that Dick's quick foray had overpassed, and the provisions that she plundered were enough to feed her men until relief could come. But then, looking out toward the foothills from a high muezzin's tower, she saw Dick's line of wagons and believed that he proposed to entrench himself in that position.

"Idiot!" she laughed, gazing through binoculars. "He waits for more men! He will wait an hour or two too long!"

It was useless, yet, to try to send her Cossacks out against the wagon-barricade. They could loot the bazaar, but their fighting pluck was gone.

"Guns!" she muttered. "I must smash that wagon barricade with guns!"

But the guns had been sent to harry Dick in his former fastness up in the Elburz Mountains. First had gone half the available infantry to hunt him from the hills, and the guns had followed later to pound him and his men to fragments when they broke for open country. It had been that expedition she inveighed against, for she believed they could reach Dick and smash him; and then she had loved him.

But Dick stole a march on infantry and guns alike; he had burst on Astrabad unheralded and unexpected. She blenched, now, at the thought of how he had ridden in and had carried her out again for his own honor's sake. Contemptuously he had set her in a safe place and had ridden off, so, she cursed him through set teeth and cursed again because the guns were not there to pound him into bits.

They had sent for the guns when Dick first showed at dawn, and she had advised waiting for them so that Dick might not be hurried; for she loved him then.

Now, she cursed because prudence and her own orders would prevent the guns from coming until the infantry—at least a day ahead—could turn, overtake them, and be escort.

"Gallopers!" she ordered. "Four! No, six!"

She wrote a letter, and made six copies of it, ordering the guns to hurry back and *not* wait for their escort, explaining in fifty words that Dick Anthony was entrenched near the city, and that therefore the road below the foothills must be clear. She sent them one at a time at intervals, in case of accidents. Two got by unobserved. The following three were seen.

It was the last man whose letter reached Dick Anthony.

III

WREATHED in the rising mist, Dick Anthony stood silent on the cliff's projecting lip and gazed through binoculars. He seemed breathless, although behind him—like the hum of an angry hornet-host—his men buzzed excitement and amazement that would not be stilled. Some sculptor might have carved him from a pinnacle of granite, to preach resolution and inspire a conquered folk to rise.

"Silence!" demanded Usbeg Ali.

"Silence!" swore a hundred officers who ran quickly here and there, for some men would not keep cover without a rap or two on the head from a sword-hilt.

"In the bazaars at home ye begged for *backsheesh—backsheesh!*" growled Usbeg Ali, his black beard bristling with military ardor, and his big spurs jingling as he strode among them. "Under the Cossack whips ye begged for mercy! Oi-oi! Mercy, baba! Oi-oi-oi! Now ye want to boast before the time! Hey! What a change in such a little while! Watch *him!* Does *he* boast? Does *he* speak? Or is he thinking? Aye—Persians—it is good to think!"

Dick Anthony had finished thinking, almost. He was thanking Providence that had made him a soldier's son and had set him to studying war while he was in his 'teens; that had made him hunger, since he was old enough to play with a toy sword, for the laurels only fighting-men may gather; that had made him always dream of leading some day that Highland regiment whose Colonel was an Anthony times without number, all down the ringing, reeking page of history.

Those boyhood dreams had been his inspiration, to strive—to study—to attain. For all his one spare shirt, and boots that were beginning to be worse for wear, the man who stared so earnestly at far-away artillery was a finished, educated soldier. Thorough in everything, he had even made himself an expert on the bagpipes because, in his opinion, there was nothing that a Colonel should not know; he had meant, when his day came to command a regiment, to be able to choose his own pipe-major without assistance or advice. Artillery was not his service, but he knew all the books could tell him about guns.

He had been omnivorous. He had studied—read—invented—listened—(principally listened)—until he knew more of the art of war than many veterans of twice his years and a thousand times his experience. Besides his twin gifts for work and listening, he had a genius that could bridge gaps, and fill up the unknown with such shrewd guesswork that a problem would be answered in his mind almost before other men had grasped its nature.

Little did the Russians dream, when they laid their plans to harry and hunt him, that they had chosen for their quarry a brave gentleman who was more than match for their generals. They treated him almost as a joke. They half feared that he might lose courage, or that the Persians would soon tire of him and then their new brigand would no longer be a plausible excuse for marching men down over the Atrak River.

Even after his first swift victory, that sent a Cossack regiment marching in weaponless shame back to Astrabad, they had not taken him seriously. The army, defying the Princess, refused to be sacrificed again, and demanded his death or capture; but nobody believed the task would be very trying, of raking him out from his mountain stronghold and bringing him to bay on the plain. They sent infantry, in no great hurry, to draw a cordon through the hills and harry him down to the open land below; and they sent guns, in still less hurry, to wait on the plain and riddle his men with shrapnel when they broke for the open, or in case they tried to stand. But they failed to see the difference between Persian outlaws lacking a real leader and the same men led by Richard Anthony of Arran. They let the guns follow along without an escort!

For a moment—a short, swift-thinking moment—with a city at his mercy and his men all yelping for the loot—Dick Anthony had used that gift of his—had placed himself mentally in the enemy's position—had deduced, and had done the opposite to what anybody would expect.

"*Bahadur!*" said Usbeg Ali, drawing nearer now respectfully, yet somehow with a hint of insolence. He was angry that he had not been consulted. "When we first looked on Astrabad three days ago, I too saw those guns going the other way. I knew they had gone after us, and that we had given them the slip. But—who brought word that they were coming back without an escort?"

"I saw gallopers go off to warn them the minute we showed up," said Dick.

"But——"

"Didn't our scouts tell us about infantry, more than a day's march ahead of the guns? Weren't the guns likely then to wait somewhere for the infantry to overtake them on the way back?"

"Yet, here they are without the infantry!" said Usbeg Ali.

"Recall that barricade of wagons?"

"Aye."

"The Princess thinks we're all behind it, and she wants guns in a hurry to splinter it up! The guns waited first, then got a second message and came on alone."

"But who could have known she would reason that way? Who could have known she would not be cautious and warn the guns not to move until the infantry had overtaken them?"

The Afghan, too, was a soldier. He was old in war; and he had not quite forgotten his resentment at Dick's secrecy. It would have suited him well to prove Dick's reasoning at fault, whatever the chance outcome of the reasoning. He was forgetting his former recognition of the Hand of Allah!

"That was no soldier's chance to take, *bahadur!* That was a plan like a woman's—supposing this, and supposing that—without much fact to go on, and leaving over much to chance! A soldier should select one fact and build on it!"

Dick closed his binoculars, snapped them in their sling-case, and faced Usbeg Ali at last, with a good-humored smile that made the Afghan wish he had not spoken; it was almost affectionate and it was so expressive of intelligence that mere temper—mere resentment—could not stand against it.

"Would we have been better off," asked Dick, "scattered through city streets, with the men looting and the inhabitants getting more than tired of us? Would it have been better to wait there to meet guns and infantry combined?

"We might have met guns and infantry together here," insisted Usbeg Ali. Easterns, when they harbor the least resentment, can be obstinate as mules.

"As it is we're luckier than I hoped for and we'll take 'em one by one! I'll trouble you to get your men in hand, Usbeg Ali. Get a thousand hidden along that ridge to our right—that ridge that reaches out across the plain. You'd better hurry—the gunners won't be long about breakfast.

"Wait! Play a waiting game! When they get well within range, open on them; they'll limber up and retire to look for their supports after they've answered with a round or two. Leave 'em to me, then. Don't follow—pepper 'em at long range, but don't break cover. Send Macdougal to me!"

In a minute Andry stood overtopping Dick by at least six deferential inches.

"I was thinkin', Mr. Dicky——"

"Oh. Another man with a grievance? Can't you bury it?"

Dick was in no mood for one of Andry's lectures on morality or any other subject. He had each move for that whole morning planned ahead, and his extraordinary eyes were gleaming. He was eager to begin, yet no more in a hurry than the captain of a ship that runs on schedule time—impatient only of unnecessaries. Usbeg Ali Khan, of Asia, was entitled to the same consideration as a little child. Andry, ex-private of the Line, could be treated as a full-grown man who understood.

"Na-na! If I'd a grievance, as ye ca' it, I'd inflict it on ma team! Ye canna grieve me while ye're the man ye ar-r-e. I was thinkin'——"

"What?"

"Ye'll do better if ye dinna gang too near yon guns. Send ither folks! Send less highly impor-r-tant bodies! Stan' ye here, on this cliff-top, Mr. Dicky, an' dir-r-ect the fechtin' like a general! Ye're o'er fond, mannie, o' exposin' y'rsel' to verra onnecessary but amazin' risks! Thinkin's your affair—the fechtin's oors—I'd have ye remember that! This expedition—or whatever else it is—wad be like a man wi' his head cut off, gin anything shud happen to ye—it 'ud tur-r-n to wu'ms, an' they'd a' run different ways!"

"Is that all?" asked Dick.

"That's a'."

"Then, get your gun away! D'you see that copse between two hillocks over to the right—no, that one, at this end of the long ridge?

"Well—Usbeg Ali Khan will hide his infantry along that ridge, and I want you with your machine-gun in the copse at this end of it. Keep out of sight and don't open on the Russians until they're so close that you can't miss. Don't shoot their horses—I want their guns, teams and all—d'you understand!"

"Aye—I ken."

"Then, start!"

"Wull ye no' promise ye'll keep out o' range, Mr. Dicky?"

Dick laughed.

"I'll tell you what I promise you, my man!" he answered. "If you talk treason I'll reduce you to the ranks and make you carry my bag! Be off! Get your gun away!"

"Good-by, Mr. Dicky!"

The giant held out his hand and Dick shook it, squeezing until Andry's eyes watered.

"What's the matter, Andry? What's all the fuss about? D'you feel afraid?"

"Aye! I'm feared! We twa ha' tackled men taegither — day an' night — we've sailed stor-r-my seas—we've fought i' the dark—an' we've aye won. But this is the verra first time we tuke on guns, Mr. Dicky; I'd rayther ha'e ye promise to keep oot o' range! Wull ye no' promise—jus' this fir-r-st time?"

"No," said Dick swallowing a smile. " 'Shun! Right about turn! To your gun! Quick! March!"

N SO, WHILE the gunners ate their breakfast, there crept between them and Astrabad a long line of Persians who had a crow or two to pick with Russia—men who needed little warning, now, to keep under cover and be silent. Most of them had seen Russian grape-shot go whistling through the streets of taken cities; Russian "temporary occupation" of Northern Persia had been of the time-honored Tartar type, including "education" of the natives. They knew about artillery, and could respect it; so they crept unheard, unseen.

On either hand from where Dick's high, projecting cliff-edge overhung the plain there went a long, low ridge, each in the rough shape of a semicircle, one concave and the other convex. Each ridge grew lower and flatter rapidly, as it left the foothills, until where it reached the plain it was little more than man high. Man high, though, each extended miles on either hand toward the distant Caspian, and there was no way of reaching Astrabad without crossing both of them. They were easy enough to cross, for a fairly well worn track led straight over them at spots where the ridges had been broken, either by the crossing of some ancient army or by the whim of nature.

A trumpet sounded. Leisurely the gunners seized their reins and mounted. They started at an easy walk—six guns, one following the other, with an extra ammunition-wagon to each gun and a quite considerable convoy of provisions. Ahead—only a little way ahead, and more because it was the rule than for precaution's sake—there rode what should have been the battery ground-scouts; nominally that was what they were—actually they were a screen that served to lull the rest into a false sense of security.

A second trumpet sounded for the trot; and for perhaps four hundred yards the column jogged and bumped along, with heavy wagons jolting in its wake, making the dull, rumbling thunder that rides ever with artillery. Then, an officer of the advance saw something on the ridge ahead that awakened his curiosity.

Instead of sending an alarm back, and letting the guns halt until he had investigated, he galloped ahead alone; and as he spurred—timed to a nicety—Dick Anthony led his seven hundred horsemen at a walk behind the other ridge. Now, the Russians were between two hidden bodies of an enemy and absolutely unsuspicious of the fact.

The officer rode on and nothing happened. He reached the ridge at a point where low bushes crowned it. He rode over it and disappeared. Nobody heard the yell for help as he was dragged from his horse and knifed; nobody saw his body again, for the jackals finished it that night.

The rest of the battery continued to advance, sublimely ignorant of twitching fingers curled over triggers, and of a machine-gun whose mechanism purred to the testing of a canny, careful Scot. The Cossacks loosed their tunics—lit their pipes—and some of them began to sing.

It was that other sense all savage people have—that soldiers can acquire by dint of training—and that mobs sometimes betray—that wordless intuition of impending danger that brought the advance guard to a halt at last within a hundred yards of the ridge. They halted first, and then an officer called "Halt!" without exactly knowing why.

The order had but left his lips when a rifle-shot made the word his last one; and then instantly the whole long ridge became a line of spurting flame, and there was no advance-guard any longer—only a row of horses that stood patiently, and one loose horse that galloped back. Heads appeared above the ridge, and yells that made blood run cold were raised in a sudden storm of sound. It was the yells, and not rifle-firing that sent the trained horses galloping back at last, to throw the gun-teams in confusion and delay the business of "action front."

Training, good leading, courage, and the pride that rode with them because they trespassed on a foreign soil, all helped the Cossacks—those and bad shooting; for the Persians were excited and their aim was villainous. The Russians unlimbered and got into action with a speed that did them credit, and there were enough men left to man each gun and send a withering dose or two of grape shrieking on its way across the ridge.

But Andry's machine gun opened on them—*pip—p-p-p-p-ip-ip-ip-p-pip—pip-pip!* He was taking his time and picking off the gunners. When two guns faced 'round to attend to him there were only just enough men left to obey the instantly succeeding order to limber up and go. In a storm of bullets that seemed to slit the very universe in fragments, and that rattled off the barrels of the guns like hail on a window, the Cossacks hooked their teams up, turned, and fled—back in the direction of the mountains—back to meet the infantry who should be hurrying hot foot to catch up with them.

They rode straight toward Dick Anthony. He loosed but half his seven hundred, and rode straight at them! There would not have been room to turn had he used his whole force of mounted men; and he would have foregone the charge—would have shown himself, and waited for the Russians to surrender—but for his fear that the Cossacks might perhaps have time to break their breech mechanism. He wanted those guns entire, for a venture that no Cossack would have dared to dream of.

* * *

THERE was sword-work before the guns were taken, and Andry Macdougal's fear for Dick came near to being justified. A major of Cossacks, maddened at losing the battery that represented all the pride he had, singled out Dick and met him halfway, blade to blade. He knew the stories about Dick that had gone abroad in constantly exaggerating circles; he knew it had been said that Dick was an impostor and not the real Richard Anthony of Arran; he remembered it all now as he rode, and in perfectly good French he hurled it at Dick's head.

"Impostor" was the mildest word he used; but he grew silent when the chargers' heads were but six yards apart and he could see Dick's eyes—blazing, amazing eyes—that looked straight through him, over the hilt of a sword that did not move. Something of a duellist was Major Guchkov; he had met a man at dawn five times, and had survived untouched; he knew the sword well enough to prefer it to the chance of pistols, and full well enough to know a better swordsman when he met one. Now—as he watched that still, keen claymore point, that seemed to be unaffected by the charger's galloping—he recognized a better sword than his. When the points met and the sparks burst out along two glancing blades, he *felt* a better sword than his, and a wrist that gave him qualms of anticipation up and down the backbone. The odds were on Dick Anthony from the instant they touched points.

But a Cossack raced to his Major's aid, and Dick's good charger groaned, hamstrung and helpless. A Persian shot the Cossack dead as Dick dismounted, but the

Russian major's sword missed Dick by the breadth of a breath of air.

"Ping!" came a shot from Andry's gun, in proof that a Scot's clan-loyalty is wide awake. *"Ping-ping!"* But the charger plunged, and the shots went wide; and then Dick was between Andry and the Russian, so the shooting ceased. Dick seemed to be half paralyzed—as if the loss of his charger had bewildered him—for he stood with his sword-point down and seemed to wait for the inevitable end. Some of the Persians saw his plight, but none rode to his assistance; they had heard too much about his being Iskander reincarnated; this seemed like anticlimax, and it struck them useless.

Only Andry, squinting down the barrel of his hot machine-gun, read the signs rightly and exulted. He had seen Dick fight in the old days on the Isle of Arran, when the bigger boys from other villages had come to make him prove his title to be leader or relinquish it for good. He knew Dick's trick of waiting, and in thirty seconds more he slapped the gun as if it were an understanding thing.

"I told ye so!" he murmured confidentially.

The Cossack major grew a little over-confident—a little bit too rash. Seeing Dick's drooped head and lowered sword-point, he imagined Dick was hurt. He recalled the offer of five thousand roubles for Dick Anthony alive or dead; and he considered that a dead Dick Anthony, from personal experience and all accounts, would be easier to take to Astrabad than a live one.

"Surrender!" he yelled; but he gave Dick no opportunity to yield. Instead, he rode in with a rush, to make an end; and Dick seemed to wait for him with almost resignation.

What actually happened then was too quick for any one who witnessed it to describe correctly afterward. The major rode point-first, and there were some who swore that Dick's point rose in the nick of time and turned his upward. But most said that Dick ignored his sword completely, and it is certain Dick did not stand too long; nor, when he moved at last, did he take the officer on the side expected.

He sprang, if a man may be said to spring whose movement is too quick to see, crossed the horse in front, and seized the major's leg. He could have killed him then and there, for the horse raced on and Dick's grip was unbreakable; held as he was with a leg nearly torn out by the roots, the major could not bring his sword-arm into play. He kicked, but suddenly Dick sprang again; and this time the major shot clear out of the saddle on the off side, landing on his head and shoulder.

The next thing that the Russian knew was that Dick's foot was on him, and a claymore's two-edged point was at his throat.

"Did you mention the word 'surrender'?" Dick inquired.

"No!" swore the Russian from between set teeth.

"I'll put it differently. Will you surrender?"

"*Sacré cochon!* Is urrender to no outlaw in the world!"

The Russian spoke in French, and Dick answered him in French with that eloquent smile of his that seemed to light up his whole face.

"Will you surrender your guns and men?" he asked.

"I surrender nothing!"

"What a rotten poor chooser you must be!" laughed Dick. "Here — you — and you!"

He called up half a dozen men and ordered one of them to snatch the major's sword away.

"Now, bind him hand and foot!"

He looked once keenly at all six of them, memorizing faces; each knew that he could pick all six again out of a thousand, should he wish to.

"I hold you six answerable for him!"

He had time to look around him then, and in a second his calm humor left him. His eyes blazed again and his lips became a straight, hard line. His Persians were butchering their Cossack prisoners! Dozens lay dead amid the gun-wheels and under the legs of horses. Fifty more were lined up, ready to be shot, and he was just in time to fling himself in front of them, and stop the volley that would have turned his battle-field to a shambles and his victory to a crime.

He cursed them. He called them cannibals. He mounted the captive major's horse and rode among them flogging them with a broken rein. He swore they deserved to have Cossacks ruling them. He swore he would never lead another Persian, or strike another blow for a country that bred only murderers and swine. He ordered them away from the guns—away from the prisoners and wounded—out of his own sight. And, when Andry left the machine-gun by the copse to walk across and talk Scots words of comfort to him, the big man found him sitting on the carcass of the hamstrung charger he had put out of its misery, his sword across his knees, his red, bare head between his hands, sobbing his heart out like a little child.

"Oh, Andry—Andry—am I chargeable with that?" he asked. "Am I an Anthony, or——"

"Laddie, ye're a gude Scots gentleman!" said the big man, kneeling by his side.

"Is it worth it, Andry? We've been touching pitch, and we're defiled! I thought I could teach them to be decent—I thought I could make 'em deserve to win! I was wrong, Andry—I'm an ass—I should have pulled out right at the beginning!"

"Laddie!"

Once before Andry had seen him that way, when he broke a leg and with it the chance of ever getting an army commission by the front-door route. It had taken hours, then, for the tremendous, patient Scot to find a way of rousing him to his true form; but, sitting and arguing beside a convalescent chair he had found it at last, and he remembered now.

"Laddie—Mr. Dicky—d'ye no remember what the Cossacks did tae oor Persian prisoners? D'ye remember that mon's back where the whup had cut in criss-cross? Wad these puir de'ils no' hanker for revenge, wi' that example i' their minds?"

"Thanks, Andry!"

Dick stood up. He stared at a little herd of Russians who had thrown their weapons down—at fifty who lay dead—and at his own men, who stood about in no pretense at order, each with a horse's bridle-rein across his arm.

"You invited me to be your leader!" he said with a voice that rang again. "I refused, but you insisted; I agreed at last. Now—by the living God, I'll lead—and I'll lead men—not animals! There shall be a lesson here—now—that will be remembered while this campaign lasts! Stand still! Stand exactly where you are! I'll shoot the man who moves! Andry! Get back and cover them with your machine-gun! Hurry!"

IV

MIDNIGHT found the Princess Olga Karageorgovich, chin on hand, staring at the distant Persian watch-fires that danced before a row of upset wagons. She sat in the little four-square space at the top of a muezzin's tower, and it suited her well, for there were openings on all four sides, through which she could look down on the city and half the countryside without once moving.

She believed Dick Anthony behind that row of fires; for, as a panther thinks his enemy is stealthy, and the wild-eyed bull-buffalo imagines his antagonist is bold, so she believed Dick Anthony would reason much as she did. She had no prudence in her being, nor did she believe he had any. She was all cunning, bravery, and tigerish desire; and although she had loved him for the naked honesty he lived and spoke, she ignored it utterly when planning his destruction. Now that no fate could be too mean for him in her eyes, no motive could be too sneaking to attribute to him; he had committed the worst of all offences—he had spurned her love; already she half believed him capable of cowardice, and she was sure he was a liar!

Reasoning, in her wild, swift-twisting way, ignoring facts, and trusting only prejudice, she had deduced that Dick was afraid to keep the city he had won. She knew that he knew there were guns to fear and she suspected he had seen the dust of them when he first looked down on Astrabad from his hill-top. She began to be glad she had found him out so soon—to comfort herself with the reflection that a man who flinched in the hour of his success would have failed her sooner or later anyhow. She believed him now to be waiting for reinforcements, and perhaps to be arguing with a swarm of discontented men. The only alternative suggestion she could make was that he meant to watch for the returning guns and then slip back to his mountain-top where he would think that he was safe.

Safe! She vowed, as she looked up at the silver stars, that never while she lived, and poison, a bullet, or cold steel could work, should Dick Anthony be safe from her! She would hunt him, track him down, kill him with her own hand if she must; but she hoped for, and was nearly certain of an ugly end in wait for him when the guns came back. She wrote another message and sent six more gallopers careering through the night; and this time each bore a little map that showed the line of Dick's probable retreat. The infantry were told, instead of following the guns, to climb into the foothills—hunt for Dick's trail—and lie on it in ambush. She had loved him with all her wanton might that morning; tonight, Hell raged in her, and her hate of him was something to be cultivated—nursed—and shielded.

Feverish hands, she knew, were laboring at the wires that had been cut. Within an hour from midnight she expected to be in touch again with Petersburg and the secret, swift-pulsing heart of half the world's treachery. The Okhrana, then, would have to know what the outcome was of the plan to use Dick Anthony.

The thought was disquieting. She had failed a time or two before, and so on this occasion they had warned her to succeed, or else be relegated to the fate that waited on her failure. Even then she would be envied by the world that reads, but does not know. There was a marriage waiting for her, and a word from the Czar of all the Russias would be enough to make her the legal property of a man the thought of whose boorishness and gilded gluttony brought shudders from her more than a thousand miles away. She *must* win! Death—any kind of death—would be better a million times than life on that man's Siberian estates.

But that thought brought others, and it seemed to her she had won! From the first the plan had been to make Dick Anthony an outlaw, so that Russia—or rather the Okhrana, that is Russia's bane—might have excuse for bringing down more troops to Persia. Were two defeats within a week—two routs—the bursting open of a Russian jail, and release of a prisoner—the looting of Russian stores and ammunition not enough? What great power in the world would stand that much without striking a blow back? What more excuse was wanted for the invasion of Persia by an army corps?

She began to see, now, that her vengeance on Dick Anthony might be accomplished better while at the same time making her own position doubly strong with the Okhrana. No doubt her masters would have grown suspicious. No doubt some telegrams had gone from discontented army-men complaining of her policy, that until now had presaged nothing but disaster; no doubt there must have been somebody with brains enough to see through her former regard for Dick. And it was known in Russia that she loved him, for once she had been unwise enough to demand him for herself as the price of her services!

It was good, she told herself, that the wires were down, and that the first message to flash along them when they were repaired could be one from her, claiming to herself full credit for the situation! She would wire them to start their army on the march southward! She would claim that she had deliberately sacrificed a regiment or two, in order to have ground enough for action! And, to allay suspicion, she would let them know now that she hated Dick—she would demand, instead of his life, his torture in her presence should he happen to be caught alive. In the secret code, whose key was memorized by not more than a dozen people, she began composing messages that would be short enough but would carry sufficient emphasis; and presently she descended the brick steps of the tower, humming to herself.

Through the dark, stifling streets she ran swiftly, though entirely unafraid, to a palace that had been assigned to her for quarters, before she and the military came to loggerheads. There, in a strong-box that was screwed to a heavy table, there were papers that contained the whole Russian depositions as well as a chart of Persia's weaknesses. Marked in red, on a one-inch-scale map, were the stations where large sections of an army-corps were camped in readiness; above the curved course of the Atrak River there were dotted red lines that represented routes, and there were figures that showed the number of men in each place. Letters of the alphabet denoted infantry, artillery, or guns. Other figures, close to the dotted lines, told how many days the troops in each station might require to reach the Atrak River. The particulars were not such as are printed on the standard maps; they represented Russia's way of keeping faith—the facts—the full of her intention to observe a promise and Persia's integrity.

She opened the box now and chuckled as she drew her finger over the map, sweeping every other minute at the moths that fluttered against the lamp or fell singed on her secret papers. Suddenly she slipped the map back into its envelope (that was exactly like a dozen other envelopes) and called for her maid.

"Marie!"

Red-eyed, the maid appeared from behind a curtain, walking as if in her sleep and frightened by bad dreams. She yawned, and the Princess scowled at her.

"Have you never finished sleeping?" "Bah! Isn't sleep like death? One lies in a frame—coffin or bed, no matter which—and thinks nothing—does nothing—useless—stupid. Are you stupid tonight, Marie?"

"*Non, non, madame!*"

The maid seemed terrified. She shrunk away, until she seemed afraid to shrink farther.

"Because I can help you to wake up, if necessary!"

"*Non, non, madame!* I am awake! I am not stupid! What is it that I am to do? I am wide awake!"

"Sit there!"

The Princess pointed to a chair at one end of her desk, and the maid sat on it, leaning both elbows in front of her. For a moment the Princess stared in a brown study at the white wall opposite, and any one who watched the maid at all closely might have seen that her eyes were never still; they searched the table inch by inch, missing nothing—even counting the envelopes that lay by the opened strong-box.

"Write!"

The maid seized a pen and looked for paper. The Princess lifted the big envelopes, drew about a quire of paper out from underneath them and tossed it on the pile impatiently. The maid picked up the paper, and with it the top envelope.

Of old, she had even been used as secretary when matters of great secrecy and import were in hand; for she was not supposed to understand them, and as a very general rule she did not. But an atmosphere of secrecy breeds curiosity, and the Princess would have been surprised to know how many documents the maid had read and memorized; it had become almost a habit with her to secrete papers—study them—and put them back; and now that she loved Andry, habit seemed duty to her. She stole anything, on the merest chance that it might prove to have some bearing on his fate.

Unlike her mistress, she could love constructively, consistently, thoughtfully; like her mistress she dared run any risk for the sake of the man she loved; unlike her mistress she could love and serve without the faintest prospect of return; but she trembled as she thought of what would happen to her should the Princess catch her in the act of stealing papers. She knew that her whole usefulness—to the Princess, to herself, and Andry—depended on the reputation she enjoyed for stupid indifference in all matters except those concerning the Princess' toilet.

With deft fingers, now, she took dictation, writing in longhand but so swiftly that the Princess scarcely had to pause. The Princess spoke with her eyes on the wall in front—as if she were focusing the future—and she did not notice that Marie Mouquin had inserted carbon-paper underneath the sheet she wrote on.

Sheet after sheet was filled. Sheet after sheet was laid on the blotter; but a carbon copy of each sheet fell on the maid's lap, and in a moment when the Princess paused to think, shifting in her chair restlessly and glancing to the shuttered window, the sheets were rolled up and slipped into a stocking.

Incident by incident, the Princess gave her version of North Persian history from the moment when Dick Anthony had landed on the Caspian shore until that hour. Move by move she planned ahead the marching of an army-corps, and the preparations that could be made in Persia in advance of it. The finished document was a masterpiece that a general of any army in the world might have folded up with pride; and as she folded it she laughed at the maid whose eyes were dim and red from lack of sleep. Her own blazed like twin jewels.

"Go!" she said. "Sluggard! Go and sleep! You are like a snake; you eat, you sleep, you eat, you sleep! I wonder—snakes are treacherous—are you?"

"*Non, non, madame!*" said Marie Mouquin, hurrying away.

At dawn they brought word that the wires had been repaired. By that time Olga Karageorgovich had a message ready, written out in code; and hers was the first message that went through. It stated, after asking that the army corps be started on its crawling way, that a letter giving fuller and important details followed; and the letter started, one hour later, in the pocket of a man whose orders were to kill as many horses as he could by galloping.

But before dawn, another messenger had gone off in a different direction; he bore a copy of the Princess' letter, and the original of her secret map. Stowed with them in the envelope was a sheet, on which the maid had poured her heart out in what she thought was perfect English; and the whole was addressed in a trembling hand to Monsieur MacDoogle, *chez* Monsieur Richard Anthony.

This man, too, had orders to ride, but it did not enter the maid's head to tell him to kill horses. Instead, she showed him a wad of Russian paper money—gave him the half of it—and promised him the other half should he return with a receipt.

"But, who guarantees me?" asked the man. "If I deliver it, and come back, but you refuse me—what then?"

"Did I lie the last time?" asked Marie.

"Nay. Thou art no ordinary woman!"

"Would you care to fall foul of both Princess and Dee-k-Anthonee?"

"Nay! In God's name!"

"Then ride hard—and bring a receipt!"

V

USBEG ALI KHAN came, spurring his charger. He had seen a butchery or two in Kabul; under Abdur Rahman he had helped attend to the punishment of rebel tribes, and he was not squeamish in the matter of killing prisoners. But he was happy as a child about the captured guns; he was ready to give in to Dick on any point—to subscribe to his most quixotic doctrine—provided only Dick would give him command of the battery. He gave yeoman aid at once. Shrewd cross-examination—tricky, flattering questions that betrayed while they seemed to reassure—quick instinct, and the trick of reading Eastern minds brought out the truth—or most of it. There were three-and-forty of Dick's horsemen who admitted blood-guilt—three-and-forty who confessed to having killed a prisoner after taking his weapons away.

"Line them up!" commanded Dick.

The forty-three, dismounted and deprived of all their martial gear, were pushed and hustled into one head-hanging line. Plainly, they expected to be shot; but Dick's next order seemed to lessen that probability without disclosing any other.

"Line up the Russians facing them!"

The battery, with its convoy and extra ammunition-wagons had numbered about two hundred and fifty men; for the allowance of camp-followers, butchers, cooks and servants had been generous, and there were men with the battery, of the Russian half-political, half-military type, who swelled the total. Not more than a hundred of them, now, including officers, were left to stand in line, two deep, facing Dick's culprits. They stood trying to seem confident; some laughed; not more than half a dozen of them betrayed anxiety, though a keen observer, such as Dick, or Usbeg Ali Khan, or Andry, might have read the truth that underlay their swagger.

"Bring up our infantry! Let all our men form a hollow square around the prisoners!"

Unquestioning now—for he had thrown criticism to the winds, and since the capture of the guns would have believed Dick and obeyed him had he said Hell was to be stormed—Usbeg Ali cantered off. Dick walked to where the Russian major lay, tight tied between six guards. He turned him over, felt him, and drew out a fountain-pen from the left breast-pocket of his dusty tunic.

"Thanks!" he said, walking back again and sitting on the trunnion of a captured gun. He began to write, taking no notice at all of the milling crowd who did their best to form hollow square but had forgotten how. He tore sheet after sheet from a memorandum-book, and though the letter that he wrote was short he tore up many a version of it before he was satisfied.

At last Usbeg Ali rode to him, swaggering with all the military manner that he loved, and saluting with a sweep that would have done credit to a South American field-marshal.

"Your army waits in hollow square, *bahadur!*"

Dick—silent as usual when his mind was made up—mounted the Russian major's charger and rode through a gap in the square past Andry who stood by his bright machine-gun like a statue of Discipline. Andry's sixty men, who could not understand his tongue and whose tongue he could not speak, were none the less the only ones except the Russians who wore much of a military air above their rags; the rest looked what they were—outlaws who were trying to be soldiers. Andry's men could have been picked out of a million, by the hollows he had drilled between their shoulder-blades.

"Gather the Russian wounded!" ordered Dick, and Usbeg Ali Khan told off a dozen men to do it.

"Put them on horses—two to a horse!"

"Gun-horses or ours?"

"Ours. We want the gun-teams."

Usbeg Ali explained the order; then he hurried after Dick. But Dick sent him back again.

"Order those six guards to bring the enemy's major! Stand him on his feet before his men!"

Unmurmuring—for there was something in Dick's manner that suggested dynamite—the Afghan, second-in-command though he was, acted the part of orderly, and three minutes later the Russian major stood in the center of the hollow square, flinching under Dick's gaze.

"Cut his bonds!" commanded Dick, and somebody obeyed. The major rubbed his wrists and smiled between thin lips.

"Take this note!" said Dick, riding forward, and handing him a sheet from his memorandum book. The Russian took it, read it, raised his eyebrows, smiled, and folded it again.

"Which of you is the doctor?" demanded Dick in French.

An officer stepped out.

"You may go and search for your medical kit, and carry away enough for the march back to Astrabad."

The surgeon-lieutenant walked off astonished, and Dick ordered an opening made at the far end of the square. It was done without shouting and with no confusion, for the men had their attention fixed now, and moved to the words of command as if hypnotized.

"You have my leave to go!" said Dick in Persian, and the Russian major laughed.

Dick held out the fountain-pen; the Russian refused it; so Dick let it fall, and it lies there now unless some freshet came and washed it into the Caspian.

The Russian gave three quick orders to his men, and in an instant Dick's forty-three found themselves surrounded.

"Forward!" came the order; and the Russians marched out of the square with the Persian prisoners in their midst.

"Tell off twenty-five horsemen to follow, and make sure they march in the right direction!" ordered Dick, and Usbeg Ali hurried to obey.

"Close up the square again!"

Again Dick was obeyed as though his voice were the crack of Moslem doom and this judgment-day.

Twice he rode round the square, and, as he passed, each man felt the back of his brain lie bare, for Dick's extraordinary eyes missed nobody; each man felt as if singled out for special notice and particular resentement.

"Now, listen to me!" he thundered, sitting the Russian major's charger and surveying three sides of the square. "I said—when I agreed to lead you—that I would kill the man who did anything a soldier should not do. I have been better than my word. I have handed those men over to the Cossacks! I will leave all of you to worse than death—leaderless again at Russia's mercy—if another prisoner is killed, or one more thing is done of which a decent soldier ought to be ashamed. That is all! Usbeg Ali Khan, pick out the men you want to handle those captured guns! Look alive now!"

Picking them took very little time, for from the first all the efficiency of the little army had depended on prodigious efforts at selection. Usbeg Ali Khan and his seven, Andry Macdougal, and Dick, had each exerted all his skill with the result that the men fitted for promotion were all known.

* * *

THE main need was to promote company commanders in place of six of Usbeg Ali's Afghans; for they had been officers in Abdur Rahman's field artillery and would have to serve now as gunners and gun-captains, instructors, sergeants, bombardiers or drivers—in any capacity at all, so be the guns were gotten in position and then worked when Dick had need of them. Good, loyal soldiers that they were, they gave up their commands and rode forward to the new task with grins in lieu of grumbling; and being the only trained artillerymen there, only they appreciated what would be the task of making gunners from half-trained outlaw Persians.

"Hurry those wounded away!" commanded Dick. "Give the Russian doctor a horse!"

Long ago Dick had organized a little, red-cross party of his own, under the command of a man who had learned bandaging and a little doctoring in some mission-station; his own wounded were already lying under trees, for the stretcher-bearers acted independently and, as nearly all Easterns will in matters of that kind, displayed both pride and courage.

"Thought you might care to offer us your services," said Dick, riding to where the Russian surgeon helped his last pair of wounded to mount a horse. "I've let you have a horse; you could spare us an hour or two, and catch up easily."

"If you want to know which poison to take, I'll help you," said the Russian. "But I'd shoot myself if I were you! In any case don't wait to get made prisoner! I give you that advice in return for the horse! For the rest, you may go to Hell!"

"Can you fight with your fists?" asked Dick.

The surgeon was a big man—big-boned and heavy-muscled. It would have done Dick good in that minute of his loneliness to have harked back to school-days and hammered respect for himself into an enemy, with fists that tingled to begin. Andry was a good friend and Usbeg Ali Khan another; but the one was a servant and the other a Mohammedan; equal or true comrade in its broader sense, he had none, and loneliness of that sort finds unusual expression in men of Dick's stamp. To be made love to by a woman he despised; to be treated as a demi-god by semi-savages; as an outcast by oath-breaking Cossack cads—were all three different grades and kinds of loneliness. All three kinds had eaten into him. He ached for a fist-fight.

But the Russian did not understand—or at least affected not to; probably he did not know, for Russian schoolboys are not brought up by Anglo-Saxon rule.

"What do you mean?" he asked; and heeling his horse Dick turned away from him with a sigh.

"Be off!" he ordered over his shoulder, heading his horse in the direction of the guns that Usbeg Ali exulted over with infectious glee.

"Modern guns, *bahadur!* Nearly automatic! Non-recoiling—no need to re-aim after each shot! A little intricate, the mechanism, yes—but shooting with such guns is easier to teach! Maneuvering? Ah—that is different, but we have picked our best men; we will try to teach them to maneuver quickly; they can already ride, and the teams are good! We are an army, now, *bahadur*—we have guns!"

But Dick knew they were very far indeed from being an army yet. He knew that two regiments of infantry were hurrying to overtake these guns he had just captured, and that he must deal with those regiments within a few hours. Almost surely the resulting fight would thin his ranks; and yet he was not at all anxious yet for recruits, for undrilled, unseasoned men would make his force unwieldy without adding to its strength. He had cavalry, infantry, and guns; but he lacked a reserve of ammunition for the guns—lacked commissariat, money, knowledge of the Russian plans beyond the little the Princess had told him, and the little more that he had guessed—lacked everything, in fact, that goes as a rule to make an army potent.

The Russians had all that he had not. They had even aeroplanes and wireless. He might expect at any time, he thought, to see a dozen aeroplanes circling like kites to mark him down; and he had heard too much from the Princess about an army-corps all ready to cross over the border not to believe in its existence. He had his plan made; but at that minute he did not quite see how to carry it out; he knew only that he would do his best. Every Anthony had always done his best; and more than a dozen had died doing their fighting best. Was it hardship, he asked himself, if he too must die leading a forlorn hope? Could a man die better?

"Get those guns hidden along the ridge!" he ordered. "We can't take them into the hills, and they'd be useless up there in any case. We'll wait here for those Cossack regiments!"

But he was not destined to fight two battles in the same place, for by a stroke of luck, or accident such as only happens when red war has broken loose, one of the gallopers sent off at midnight managed to pass without seeing the prisoners who were on their weary way to Astrabad. They were resting in the shade, and he galloped past, five or six miles wide of them.

Dick had hidden his six cannon in ambush; Usbeg Ali Khan and the other Afghans were busy teaching their beginners the A, B, C of gun practise; a screen of scouts had been thrown out in four directions; and Dick was busy taking stock of the contents of the captured wagons when the man appeared over the brow of a gentle rise—halted in doubt—and was brought down at long range by a rifleman.

Within ten minutes the dead man had been stripped and his letter was on its way to Dick. In the Princess' usual style the envelope was unaddressed, though it bore her scrawled initials. Dick tore it open—read the message to the Cossack infantry, ordering them to take to the hills and lie in ambush there—frowned, folded it, tied it in a cleft stick in a way that is customary all through the East—and called a horseman.

"Take this letter. Ride until you find the Russian infantry. Give it to their officer commanding. Say you had it from the Princess Olga Karageorgovich."

"What if he knows I lie, and orders me shot?" the Persian asked.

"Then you will die!" said Dick.

"God knows!" the man answered, turning to get his horse. "We are all in Allah's hand — thou and I and the Russians! *Bahadur*——"

The fellow gave a nearly perfect imitation of Usbeg Ali's wonderful salute.

"In case I am not believed—in case——" he changed to an Eastern salaam, both hands to his forehead, and then bowing low—"The honor has been mine, *bahadur!* May Allah give thee good counsel and good men to lead! Salaam!"

"Salaam!" said Dick, watching the man mount and ride off. "Would God they were all of them like you!" he muttered as the man turned in the saddle to wave farewell.

Dick needed rousing and he knew it. Incidents such as that man's speech—things that he would have accepted formerly as all in the day's work—were enough now to make him gloomy. Even the thought of catching two regiments of infantry asleep, and so putting all the Russian troops in that part of Persia *hors de combat,* did not set the blood boiling through his veins as it should have done. Even Andry's quiet friendship and last-ditch loyalty no longer stirred the same feeling in him. His thoughts were dwelling far too much on Scotland and his own involuntary exile. He was wondering whether he might ever clear himself of the charge of filibustering, or whatever other name they might give to his adventure—whether he might ever see his rain-swept native hills again; and his thoughts were making him sick. The great plan that still lingered in his head no longer seemed so great, nor so pressing, nor so thoroughly worth while.

Andry, worrying about him behind his back, went through the Russian medical stores in the hope of finding physic that he recognized. The names on the bottles were in Russian character, but he found at last what looked like rhubarb pills; he cut one in halves, and bit it; it was acrid, and that seemed to settle the point. Knowing Dick's contempt for medicines, but firm in his own belief in them, he ground up the other half of the pill and gave it to Dick in a cup of coffee. Ten minutes later Dick vomited until his bowels ached for emptiness, while Andry looked on, nodding grim approval.

"Ay! 'Twas his belly was the matter!" he said sagely. "In an hour or less there'll be no holdin' him again!"

Andry proved right, however wrong his diagnosis; for within an hour Marie Mouquin's messenger rode into view and threw his hands up in the nick of time. Being bribed, he had ridden half as fast again as the Princess' threatened gallopers. They led him to Dick, but he insisted he had word for "Anreema Doogeel"; and Andry recognized him as the man who had carried messages before. He was one of those not so very rare birds who have not got it in them to submit to discipline or drill—who cannot be regular in anything—but who can be loyal to the last breath in them if only trusted with a secret and well paid.

He gave Andry a big envelope, and Andry passed it to Dick without so much as looking at it.

"It's yours," said Dick. "Open it."

One by one, with awkward fingers that were more used to heavy labor, Andry drew out a letter from the French maid to himself, a folded map and twelve sheets of closely written carbon copy. He passed everything to Dick except the letter, and presently Dick was his old-time self again—awake, with his heart in his task and a steel-spring grip on things.

He sat on an ant-hill, poring over the map and comparing it paragraph by paragraph and line by line with the carbon-copy of a letter; his eyes glinted as he recognized the unmistakable genuineness of map and letter, both; he recognized careful workmanship, and most ingenious pains in the provision for a constant succession of brigades on the march southward. And with an instant genius that is born in a few men, and that can not even be acquired by most, he laid his finger on the weak spot before he had turned two pages.

Page after page, then, served to confirm his judgment. The plans had been laid for an advance. Every stage of an advance by a whole army-corps, or any part of one, was planned in detail. Fresh-water wells were marked, and the number of men and horses that could be watered at them in an hour; bad places on the roads had marks against them, and numbers to signify how many pioneers would be required to make things passable. Grazing places, crops, villages, with the number of inhabitants in each, approximate amount of corn that foragers might expect to gather in each neighborhood—all were stated clearly. The whole was a wonderful example of Russia's method and persistence in her everlasting forward crawl to warm seas.

"Look here, Andry!" Dick exclaimed. "Look here, Usbeg Ali! Where's Usbeg Ali? Send him here. Look at this, both of you. See? This is the track of the gunboats and other steam-craft that are to bring the first division by water. They're to deliver their loads in Astrabad bay and then return for more. See what it says here? Shallow water! See this foot-note? 'Water growing shallower every year.' Note the provision made for floats and native craft to be collected and kept in Astrabad bay to help the troops ashore?"

"Aye!" said Andry. "Hear this, sir." He held up the maid's letter, smacking his lips with unction. "She's a bonny, leal lassie, f'r a' she's French! Hear what she says. 'Tell him'—an' that's you, sir—'that she did love. Now she hates. The advance is ordered. She has sent a telegram. In three or four days, the steamers and many men will arrive. Other men will come slowly, overland. Tell him—Run—Run—Run!' The remainder, sir, is pairsonal to me. I may say she's anxious f'r ma health, an' ma runnin' ability! She's a verra conseederate an' leal wumman. I wad she were here."

"She's safer where she is—" smiled Dick. "More useful, too!"

"Aye! But I'm no' content aboot her mistress. Jezebel, that was wife to Ahab king o' Israel, was a virtuous leddy beside her! She's a verra bad wumman, Mr. Dicky, an' I'm feared——"

"Afraid of what?"

"I dinna ken—but I'm feared."

"Well, Andry, you shall have your maid—I think—but we'll all have to fight hard for something else before you get her. What d'you think of this, Usbeg Ali Khan?"

The Afghan was staring at the map over Dick's shoulder, running fingers through his beard and striving hard to make sense of what was altogether strange to him. In spite of his travels and his military education, his ideas on geography were vague.

"Do you see the weak spot in their plan?"

"Not I, *bahadur*! If I might study it an hour or two, and translate those Russian characters, I have no doubt I——"

"You know the history of Russia's everlasting forward movement, don't you? Now, look at this map—you're a soldier—read, man, read! Where's their fatal error?"

Usbeg Ali shook his head; he could look like a small boy flunked by his teacher when anything turned up that was beyond his mental grasp.

"Take it and look at it!" said Dick pushing the map into his hand. Andry grew interested too, and looked over the Afghan's shoulder, shoving his own painfully written letter from the maid into his shirt-pocket.

"It's all planned for advance, isn't it? Do you see the slightest preparation, anywhere, in any one particular, for a retreat? Do you see how that army-corps, or any considerable part of it, could be maneuvered so as to act on the defensive for a while? Can you see what that army-corps would do—could do—to protect its stores and lines of communication? Can you guess, even, what it would do if it were attacked from behind, and the wires were cut behind it? What would happen for instance, if it were attacked from this direction?

Dick tapped the paper with his finger and smiled as he watched the Afghan's eyes.

"In the name of Allah the Compassionate, *bahadur*, this is the gift of God! The Russians are delivered in our hands!"

"Not yet quite, Usbeg Ali! But you see the idea? They've made a foil of us—they've used us as a good excuse for the advance; and once they get here—provided we stay still—they'll have us shut in at their mercy. But we needn't stand still. We can take the fight to Russia, and that, my friend, is what we are going to begin doing this afternoon!"

Andry laid a huge forefinger on the map

and swept it across the upper half of the sheet.

"Man! Mr. Dicky! Is a' that Roosia?"

"Every bit of it, Andry."

"An' this little spit o' lan', here in this corner, is where we are?"

"Yes, here, below the Caspian."

"Man! Roosia lies like a girt whale across the top! She spans fra' sea to sea! She's tre-mendous! Ar-r-re we goin' tae fecht all yon?"

"Know how they fight whales, Andry?"

"Aye."

"How, then?"

"Mon—ye ken as weel as I—they get close up tae 'em in a wee sma' boat, an' prog 'em wi' spears. The whale thrashes an' mak's a terrific clishmaclaver, but they keep close up alongside, stickin' more spears in the while, an'——"

"They lance the whale, in other words?"

"Aye, they lance her."

"We'll lance Russia, Andry! We'll be the men in the wee sma' boat!"

"Man—Mr. Dicky—ye're a genius! I dinna believe we can—but here's ma han'! I'll gang wi' ye!"

Dick gripped his hand and squeezed.

"Usbeg Ali," he said, "Hurry please and pick me out the best four hundred men we have—four hundred die-hards to lead on a forlorn hope!"

"Will you invade Russia with four hundred?" laughed the Afghan.

"Surely," said Dick. "I want you and the rest to hold those two Cossack regiments in check behind us."

VI

THERE had been too many messages, too much ordering and counter-ordering, for the officer commanding the two Cossack regiments not now to be thoroughly on guard. When he left Astrabad in the first instance, with the joyless task in front of him of hunting for Dick Anthony amid trackless mountains, he had marched leisurely and had not seen the necessity for any fringe of skirmishers, or any other really martial precautions.

When a message reached him that warned him Dick was in his rear and that he must hurry to overtake the guns and escort them to Astrabad, he had begun to realize something of the unexpectedness of which his enemy was capable, and of the need to be awake. When the third instructions came and he was told to lie in ambush for an enemy that might return at any minute, he needed no more arousing. He appreciated that the utmost military caution would not be too great to take.

So there was a fringe of scouts three miles beyond the spot where he elected to set his ambush, and the place he chose commanded a stream above a waterfall and overlooked three trails which all led to the hills above. Unless with guns, from more than a mile away behind him, his position seemed unassailable, and on the other hand he commanded each approach.

Like the guns which Dick Anthony had captured unknown to him, he had a quite considerable convoy and food for a month or more, and it went against the grain to have to leave his wagons on the level land below. He hid them as thoroughly as possible, and made his men carry their contents up-hill to the camp; and he took the horses up-hill with him. But he was anxious about the wagons, and his anxiety proved justified.

His scouts reported the approach of Dick Anthony's men long before half of his preparations for an ambush were complete. He had dug some trenches, but they were unfinished and unhidden; the thrown-up earth was raw and visible between trees from more than a mile away to sharp eyes, and his wagons were pounced on by a squadron under Usbeg Ali, hauled into the open, and burned before his eyes.

Long-range firing began at once, but it served to do little more than disclose to Dick the nature and extent of the defenses. The first inspection satisfied him that he might well take his four hundred horsemen away, for this was a clear case for infantry and guns.

"By the wagons, he's provisioned for a few weeks, Usbeg Ali! Lay siege to him!" ordered Dick. "No waste of life, now! No recklessness! There's no excuse! Take your time, and get your guns up on that hill a mile away behind him—even if it takes a week or two to do it! Then, train your new gunners at a living target! If he surrenders, take him and his men up to our camp in the mountain-top and keep him there; otherwise, keep him hemmed in and busy. *I shall be perfectly satisfied if I find him in the same place when I get back.* Do you understand me?"

"*Bahadur*, we could burn him out! He

would try to cut his way to fresh air, if we set fire to the trees!"

"He'd manage it! His men are trained soldiers, and his officers veterans most likely. No! Lay siege to him. Entrench. Hem him in tight, and hold him there until I come!"

Partly regard for obedience, partly Dick's grasp of situations, that had come to seem little short of supernatural to the Afghan, partly an intense desire to try his hand with those beloved captured guns, induced Usbeg Ali to submit without further argument.

His pride was touched and tickled that he should be left alone with nearly all the men to pin down two Cossack regiments and hold them still. His favorite motto, that "Allah loves a brave man!" helped him to revel in the prospect, and the difficulties he foresaw were extra spices added to a soldier's meal!

He was fretful for a little while when Dick culled sixty men out of the four hundred that were chosen, and replaced them with Andry and his sixty. For a second he doubted Dick's belief in his ability to choose, for the Afghans are a touchy race.

"The Cossacks have two machine-guns on that hill!" he said sulkily.

"You'll have one. I'll leave ours with you."

"And who shall use it? He—" he pointed to Andry with a gesture that was half admiration, half resentment"—knows how. Who else?"

"Andry shall give you his best man. You must do the rest."

"But——"

"Andry!"

"Sir?"

"Pick him a man!"

There were three reasons, if no more, for taking Andry with him, and each was sound logic besides being military wise. In spite of orders and innumerable rebukes, Andry still spoke of the Afghan as a "black man" in unguarded moments. Without Dick to keep the peace, there would surely be jealousy and there might be quarreling between the two.

Then, Andry knew perhaps two dozen words of Persian; to leave him second-in-command of a besieging force whose members spoke only Persian would have been to waste a good man. The third good reason was the certainty of close-in, hand-to-hand perhaps, hard fighting—a business at which the grim good-natured Andry excelled all other men; in a hard fight he was worth full fifty to his side.

Out of range and very nearly out of sight of the Cossacks, Dick rode with Usbeg Ali around the hill and helped the Afghan place his men in such positions that, should the Russians try to cut their way through, a large force could be concentrated to oppose them in a minimum of minutes. He advised where to cut trenches and how to take advantage of the cover of the trees. He rode here and there among the men, stirring them with words that might have been picked carefully from Persian sagas—words that went straight to the heart of each man—words that fell naturally from his lips because he was a great man, who spoke truth, lived and loved it.

Circumstance, environment, taste, destiny—all seemed to point the way for Dick that afternoon. His motto—the motto of the Anthonys that has fluttered from their pennons or adorned their sword-hilts in the van of half the fights in modern history—came to his mind insistently and spurred him to swift action. "Agree with thine adversary quickly!" There was one sure way, and only one, by which he, Persia, and Russia could arrive at an agreement of any kind. Russia must yield! Persia must be free! The answer could not be too quick to suit him!

Andry was no whit behind him. The big man had a motto that had graced the crest on his regimental uniform. It was tattooed on the inside of his forearm, to remind him always of the one course that he knew without argument was right. "Hit never without justice, but hit first and hard!" He looked into Dick's eyes, glanced up and down the line of the four hundred, and then back at the centuries-old claymore that hung in a Sam Browne belt at Dick's waist.

"Let me have it, Mr. Dicky. Let me see whether or no she's shairp!"

He drew the sword from the sling while Dick said a few last words to Usbeg Ali. He squatted on the grass like a giant gnome bending above the blade and sharpening it with a pocket hone until a man might almost shave with it. For about five minutes Dick stood watching him, smiling, the sun glinting between branches on his bare red head. More than ever Dick looked like some old-time Robin Hood—Andry like Little John; only, the rattle of arms around them was of this century, and the singing of the bullets overhead seemed the overture to something more stirring, and perhaps more manly, than Robin Hood ever dared dream of. Nor had Robin Hood such a wonder of a sword as Andry handed back.

Dick mounted. Andry climbed on a horse and seized a firm hold of the saddle.

"Stand to your horses! Prepare to mount! Mount!" commanded Dick. "Two's — right! Forward — t-e-rrrr-ott, march! Left wheel!"

THE four hundred rode off, and the only man who had the least idea of what their destination might be, or of the nature of the work ahead, was Dick who rode in front of them. They followed him ungrudgingly and with perfect confidence, for they had learned by this time that to follow Dick was the same as to woo dame Fortune; and, though they knew that the hollow of his back, the set of his shoulders, the carriage of his chiseled, red head, his very seat on a charger, all spelled will that they might not tamper with and strength they dared not disobey, they were nevertheless beginning to enjoy, almost, his strange new code of honor. And to a man they gloried in the pride of being chosen. They were Deek's—King Dee-k-Anthonee's picked men!

He rode ahead for a mile or two; and then, since he did not know what new plans the Princess might have made, nor what reinforcements she might have summoned, he sent twenty men along in front of him, under an Afghan officer who knew to an ounce, or a mile, the endurance of a horse and could guess within a reasonable fraction of the limit of a man.

"Crack the pace on!" ordered Dick.

"*Inshallah!*" said the Afghan.

"And keep awake!"

"May Allah blind me if I fail to notice anything! I am a soldier!"

"Forward, then!"

So on they swept, unhampered, undelayed by infantry—in twos beneath huge green trees, whose branches made men duck to their horse's necks, and whose roots kept the horses jumping—in single file where granite rocks closed in on the down-hill trail, and the track was like a series of Gargantuan steps—at top speed when the track curved northward and the plain came in full view—at half speed, or less, to rest the horses on the southward bends, when any one who chanced to see them would be far more likely friend than foe.

They were all horsemen except Andry; all except he were light on their horses; and whenever they halted to let the beasts breathe somebody or other changed with Andry, and his two hundred and fifty odd pounds of bone and beef were hoisted on another mount.

So what had been a cruel march from Astrabad was scarcely more than a pleasant gallop back again. In the cool of the night the horses were still fresh enough to quicken the pace, and it was long before midnight when the leading scout caught sight of a watch-fire burning before the barricade of wagons. He galloped back to report all well, and nothing less than Dick's authority could have suppressed the cheer which almost burst out from the column.

But Dick had his plan square-cut and dried; he did not mean to have it spoiled by sentiment or any other force that could be coaxed, bidden or compelled; he went to the front now and led them along in silence, and it was he who answered the challenge of a sentry half a mile before he reached the barricade.

He rode on, with scarcely a word to the sentry, and his men filed after him by twos in silence.

"Salaam, *bahadur!*" said a deep voice when the barricade was near."

"You, Yussuf Ali?"

"I, sahib."

"All well?"

"All well, *bahadur!*"

"Good!" said Dick. "Leave fifty of your men here. Then take the rest and hurry to Usbeg Ali's aid. He needs you!"

"Where, *bahadur?*" The Afghan showed no disinclination. Mention of Usbeg Ali's name seemed to act like a spur on him.

"Back along the road we came. Yes, now—tonight!"

VII

OLGA KARAGEORGOVICH—Princess of Russia by incident of birth, despot by inclination, education, and sheer logic of events—took hold of the reins of government in Astrabad and held them with a grip that would have done credit to a practised ruler of another sex.

There were other Russian troops in Persia, but they were scattered here and there about vast provinces, and she dared not call them in.

For all Persia was simmering already with stories of Dick Anthony, and the withdrawal of a dozen men from one far-pushed outpost would have been construed immediately as a sign of weakness. Persia would have been in arms, roaring at Dick's back, given the half of a lame excuse.

She had to manage with the few she had—the few who had hidden from Dick Anthony when he burst into the city—the few who had marched back from defeat without their weapons, and the other few whom she herself had led into the city after a disheartening rout. She had enough men there to hold the place now against any new attempt Dick was likely to make, but not enough men by a long way to let her dare assume the offensive until the guns should come.

She sent telegram after telegram to Russia along the mended wire, urging that the army-corps be started on its way. She pointed out over and over again, until they wired back to her not to waste time on senseless repetition, that now—now—now was the golden opportunity; now, as many troops as Russia wished might be sent without risk of international objections, and such a chance would never occur again.

While she fretted for the coming of the guns, she sent out messengers and made the fisher-folk bring in their fleet; she had the bay and the neighboring shores all ransacked for craft that would do to ply between the land and anchored transports; she even set men building a long pile-pier that would help overcome the ever-increasing difficulty caused by the Caspian's evaporation and the shrinking of the Volga's flow.

And while she worked with feverish haste, thinking of a thousand and one things an incompetent would probably have overlooked, she made a mistake that was as unexplainable as it was likely to prove disastrous.

More and more—as from time to time she gazed at the row of upturned wagons—she began to despise Dick Anthony. She despised him for having ever left a city he had taken; she hated him for having saved her from the mob and then turned his back on her; and she despised him again with all her imaginative mind for failing to strike swiftly, instead of waiting for more men and for an inkling of her plans, as she felt sure he must be doing.

In proof of how carefully the Russian plans had all been laid for invasion of Persia when occasion offered, gunboats with troops on board began to arrive and drop anchor in the bay the day after her telegram was sent. There were not more than enough men with these first five arrivals to mark out the anchorage and make the hundred minor preparations that are necessary when a fleet is to disgorge an army on an unprotected coast; but the men on board knew what to do and they were enough, too, to satisfy the Princess and one other person that the game was now going to begin in earnest.

The other happened to be Dick Anthony, watching through binoculars from behind an upturned wagon on the morning after his return from dealing with the guns. He chuckled, and she chuckled, both for the same apparent reason; and then presently she took to cursing, using words that made any one who heard her shudder, because the guns were so long in coming. She was seized with a yearning to have it out with Dick—to capture him, and torture him, and kill him with her own fingers—before the army-corps could come to rob her of revenge. The sight of his dead body would not be enough for her. She, *she*—must kill him with her fingers!

Then she saw dust and a column on the sky-line. She sent gallopers to tell the guns to hurry. Gazing from a tower through strong glasses, she knew nearly as soon as the gallopers that the gunners had left their guns behind and were trudging as another regiment had done, weaponless, ashamed! Now she knew that Dick had fooled her; that he wasn't behind that row of wagons after all! Now she knew that he must be attacking the two regiments who were somewhere farther off than the guns had been! Now she knew that it was she who had been dallying, not Dick, and unless she moved swiftly to their aid the two regiments would share the fate of the rest!

And peering from behind the wagons, Dick laughed, in that strange unmusical infectious note of his, in about three keys and without a word of explanation. He hated to explain things; but he wished that Usbeg Ali Khan could have been there, to be mystified by what he felt sure was going to happen next. He enjoyed the exultation that goes with the certainty of a plan's success. He could see, bit by bit, the whole puzzle piecing itself together into the shape he wanted. He could guess what move the Princess was likely to make next; and his laugh rang like a bell as he saw the smoke of a fair-sized gunboat lifting over the seaward sky-line.

One thing he wished more than that Usbeg Ali might be there. He wanted his whole force there, to see how the forty-three were faring who had shot surrendered Cossacks. A yellow dog or a vulture, or a devil would have pitied them. The wounded had been taken off the horses, and the horses divided among officers and non-commissioned men.

The wounded had been laid on stretchers, made from boughs and their own tunics, and Dick's forty-three were carrying them —whipped, kicked, prodded along, sore-footed, thirsty, fly-pestered, suffering more than the men who lay above them, borne on their raw neck-muscles.

" 'Twould hae been mair mercifu' tae shoot yon men!" said Andry shaking his head.

"I don't think so," answered Dick.

"But, they're men, not mules, an' even a mule couldna stan' treatment such as yon! Mr. Dicky, sir—they're men! See that ane! See yon Russian use a whup on him! Man, laddy, it's tae much!"

"It's nearly enough," said Dick. "They'll make good missionaries."

"D'ye mean——?"

But Andry did not finish the question and Dick did not try to answer him. True to her custom of thinking like lightning and of acting without further thought when once she had snatched a determination, the Princess set bugles and trumpets blowing that summoned every living Cossack into the open squares, and then brought them running to the gate by companies. She brooked no argument from officers, nor any advice as to what would be better done; she ordered every armed man to start out at once to take Dick Anthony in the rear and relieve the two regiments that must be beleaguered. They pointed to the barricade of wagons that had been the object of her spleen until now.

"Idiots!" she answered. "Have no men come with the gunboats? Are there not enough men on the shore to tackle that rabble over there? They were left there for a ruse! They are nothing!"

The commanding officers refused to march out of Astrabad until the men from the gunboats had marched in, and though she stormed at them and threatened them, they stuck to their point. So there was a long delay while a little force of sailors, marines, and nondescripts was got together on the shore, and the boats were stripped of all except their engineers. Then, when the new force marched in, the old and far more numerous force marched out, hot foot, in an attempt to reach the two regiments before Dick Anthony could capture them or else utterly destroy them.

As they marched, Dick watched them closely. He had seen the men brought from the gunboats by the shore. He saw the city-gates closed and the few defences manned by newcomers. Half-way, as he was, between the city on his right front and the bay on his left, he saw everything and read between the lines. Later, he saw the new, big gunboat drop her anchor in the mud and almost her whole crew landed to be marched into the city.

RUSSIA was at her old game—advancing! No thought of a retreat, or the need for covering one, entered the head of any one connected with the business. For more years than anybody could remember Persia had not been allowed to have a gunboat, or a boat of any kind on the Caspian, under the Persian flag; the Russian Caspian fleet was organized to scatter pirates, and the pirates had all vanished long ago; the gunboats were without an enemy, and without any known danger other than the shoals. It was small wonder that they kept no anchor-watch to speak of. They kept steam up, for the Caspian storms are fierce and sudden, and a lee shore means sure disaster unless a ship can up-anchor and steam to sea; but those who were not sent ashore to man the Astrabad defences either played cards or slept.

At night, with steam hissing gently through the safety-valves in proof of readiness for all contingencies and of oil-fuel's superiority over coal, they all slept except for a man or two who watched the gages in the engine-rooms. Now and then a man would stretch himself and take a look at the riding lights of other boats, to make sure that the anchor did not drag, but then he, too, would fall asleep again and his snores would mingle with the rest. Commanders

—even the senior engineers—were all ashore. Why worry?

Dick's orders were given so silently that only the company officers gathered round him could hear them. The fifty men whom Yussuf Ali had been told to leave behind were left now in charge of the horses, and company by company the rest were led in silence to the shore, where they hid in deep shadows. Fifty men were sent to cut the wires again; for now it was Dick's turn to wish secrecy. Fifty more men laid down their arms and went in search of small boats. It was two hours after dark when the keel of the last small boat discoverable grounded between reeds and a voice said—

"All ready now, *bahadur!*"

With a little splashing and oar-bumping, which made Dick and the company commanders curse but did not disturb the drowsy gunboat-crews, the five advanced units of Russia's Caspian fleet were surrounded one by one. Dick blew a whistle, and at once the small boats all headed inward. An alarm was shouted, long too late. The bigger gunboat's siren screamed, and her search-light flickered and then flared, full-on. But by that time Dick was up the side of her—on deck with his sword drawn, and each of the other gunboats was in like predicament.

"Below with you! Get below!" commanded Dick, and the thinned-out crews obeyed. They showed less resentment and more curiosity than the military—more disposition to change masters without troubling themselves about it.

Dick knew—as every other man knows who has seen or read or listened—that of all the trained forces in the world, those of so-called "minor powers" not excepted, the Russian navy is the most mutinous and has the greatest cause to be. Half of the Russian fleet is used to compel the other half, and the consequent resentment works like the swing of a pendulum when the first half mutinies. The Russian jails are crowded with her sailors. There are some mines in Siberia that are worked exclusively by men who mutinied on one or other of the Czar's steel ships.

But even Dick, who knew what to expect, was surprised at the readiness with which he was obeyed. The engine-room crews were utterly outnumbered, and in the bowels of the biggest of the gunboats—that on which Dick held the wheel—there was grim, tremendous Andry with a rifle in his hand to see that the bridge-signals were answered instantly; but there was no opposition anywhere; the men on the other four gunboats obeyed the orders of Dick's deputies as readily, and got up anchor without waiting for a taste of force. Threats were sufficient.

The story that Russia gave the world a few days later was correct so far as it went. The Bureau of the Interior gave out, and the newspapers repeated, that a storm had swept the Caspian and the loss to shipping had been very great. It was singularly great for, contrary to rule, the loss was nearly all the Government's.

A part of the story that was missing was to the effect that once, when Francis Drake set out to singe the King of Spain's beard, and did singe it in Vigo Bay, there were two Anthonys on board his leading ships. The ventures of the "Three Red Anthonys" of those days would more than fill a book; but the memory of that happening in Vigo Bay was foremost in Dick's mind that night, and ancient history had more to do with Russia's loss than men who are not dreamers, such as Dick was, would believe.

LAST of the "Red Anthonys" of Arran, and by no means least of them, he led the way on the biggest of five gunboats through the winding shoal of Astrabad Bay and out to open water while the city behind him stared at the row of watch-fires he had left dancing before upturned wagons. Before midnight he was out of sight of land, steering by compass, and very closely followed by the rest in single line ahead.

Some of his Persians were already seasick, for there was a strong swell running; but he had brought four hundred with him, knowing well that half of them were likely to be useless; there were plenty left. His eye was on the black clouds that raced before him; his ears were wide open for the roar of water that precedes a Caspian hurricane; his brain was busy working out the course the Russians must have taken, judging by that little map he had. Before the storm burst he was sure that there was only one anchorage protected from a south wind that would be wide enough to hold the Russian gunboat fleet. And though he knew that Russians could do with their gunboats at least as much as he with his captured five, he knew too that the Russians would be towing heavily loaded transports, and that at first threat of bad weather they would run for shelter.

So he steamed with the wind behind him, ordering his men to study the bow machine-guns and bring ammunition for them up on deck. To his amazement, a Russian gunner left on board as night-watchman, volunteered to show them how to use the seven-pounders, and Dick accepted his offer without comment; the knout with its stained lash hanging in the wheel-house was sufficient comment on anything a Russian sailor did by way of treason.

Something of the same kind happened on the following ships, for when Dick led them in a long sweep round toward the lee of a big island his search-light showed their guns unhoused, and scratch crews busy trying them. In a few minutes he ordered the search-light discontinued, for his heart leaped within him at sight of Russian riding-lights. There were dozens of them! There was a regular fleet at anchor, ducking and tossing in a rising sea. There were enough ships there to be carrying ten thousand men—and he had five ships with four hundred!

A mixture of Drake's tactics and those of Nelson of the Nile were all that were practicable. Cunning maneuvering was utterly beyond the question, for he could not even signal to the men behind! He could only lead and trust them to hold pistols at the heads of Russian steersmen, and follow if they could. He recalled that Nelson had won the battle of the Nile by sailing in between the shore and the French ships—that Nelson's battle-signal on that day had been "Engage the enemy more closely"—that his own motto, interpreted by an Anthony, was close kin to Nelson's.

"Come up on deck!" he ordered down the speaking tube, and Andry came.

"Now, Andry, choose your gun—take that seven-pounder if you care to. You can see the Russian ships? They think we're part of their fleet running to shelter behind them. The storm's rising every second. By the time we're abreast of them it ought to be a hurricane, and six shots ought to turn the trick for us!"

Andry looked behind him at the four little ships that followed, rolling their scuppers under.

"Ah'm thinkin'—wull they be shootin' us?"

"Who? The Russians?"

"Na-na! Oor men!"

"Dunno," said Dick, giving the wheel a spoke or two. "The point is, get the Russians running. Doesn't much matter what else happens!"

"Um-m-m!" said Andry, striding forward clinging to whatever gave him purchase, and stripping the cover from a seven-pounder. He decided to open with that at long range, and to serve the machine-gun later, should the circumstances seem propitious. He had twenty of his sixty on board with him, and twelve of them had not succumbed to seasickness, so he set all twelve to carrying ammunition from the magazine.

But the storm burst with Caspian fury suddenly, and made shooting with the seven-pounder utterly outside the stretch of possibility.

Andry crept to the machine-gun and lashed himself to it just as Dick put the helm hard over, took the storm on his broadside, and headed for shelter.

There was a little excitement at once on the Russian craft; they turned their search-lights on him, for his place as last-comer should have been astern of them. Some of them whistled; but the sound of their sirens was carried away in the raving wind, and Dick carried straight on for where the foremost ships tossed their noses a quarter of a mile from land.

There was no deep water farther in-shore than they, and Dick guessed as much; the front ships hooted frantically; they flew strings of signals and waved wildly with a masthead semaphore; no doubt they were using wireless, too, but even had the instrument in the deckhouse been in working order Dick could not have understood a word of it.

"Full speed ahead!" commanded Dick. "Whenever you like, now, Andry!"

A-wash, a-reel, plunging like a deep-sea monster, Dick's ship headed straight for the Russian anchor-chains, followed dangerously closely by four others that moved their helms as he moved his. Suddenly a spurt of flame leaped out from a machine gun, and a stream of lead went whistling—not at the front ships but at those behind. Instantly the ships that were following Dick's opened up with all the guns they had—a score of rifles took up the refrain, turning the storm into Hell's chorus. Andry—waiting for the pitch and roll to lift him—hit what he aimed at; the others hit sea, sky and wind; but the noise and the surprise were the real missiles that night, and the holes were made in the Russian sailors' courage.

Up came the anchors of the landward ships—in the very nick of time to let them fall away before Dick's bow. Beam-on, then, to a rip-roaring hurricane, with no impetus to help them steer, they crashed back on the ships behind.

"*Rip-pip-pi-pi-pippip!*" went Andry's awful gun between every pitch and roll. The other guns thundered, belched, and spattered, making vivid flashes through the murk and striking terror into the helpless transports. The sea rose every moment and the wind licked round the ends of the island so that the anchorage was little better than the open water. Ship after ship got its anchor up, to swing, reel, roll and crash into the ship behind; and into the whole mess Andry pumped his whistling lead until the Caspian fleet was mad—stark raving frantic!

Sauve qui peut! became the order of the night! Hard chased by five little ships, not one of which was big enough to take on more than one of theirs, and not one of which, including Dick's, was shooting better than a blind man, the Russians fled and scattered. A dozen sank where they were, rammed by their friends in the haste to get away. Six steamed ahead and ran ashore, their commanders preferring that to the risk of a fight in the open with the devil or whoever else it was who had burst on them out of a racing sky. One transport, badly overloaded, took a big wave on her broadside and turned turtle; two others crashed into each other and both disabled drifted ashore some fifteen miles to the northward, where the storm smashed both ships into pieces.

Just as the Spanish Armada was defeated by the weather and not men, and only the courage of a faithful few played second to the weather, this steel armada of Russia's, for the conquering of Persia, was swept and washed into unrecognition by a Caspian southeaster. Dick took no credit to himself. He thought of Usbeg Ali's saying that "Allah loves a brave man," but he thought too of how bravery, daring and sheer foolishness are not by any means all one. He pursued the Russians until they were scattered all apart. Their searchlights showed his five boats to be Russian, and they could not guess after that who was friend and who foe. They suspected a mutiny of their own men, and fled from anything in sight until the storm took hold of them and tossed them ashore or rolled them over between steep, howling seas. And then, in that condition, Dick drew off and left them.

It needed all his seamanship to lead his little string of ships back to the shelter of the island from which he had chased the Russians. Over and again he thanked his stars that had made a sailor of him while he studied soldiering, and had taught him seamanship in the storm-swept Kyles of Bute. Over and over again he looked behind him and looked away again for fear of seeing one of his own ships swamped. In the end he steamed straight ahead, with his eyes on the island anchorage, and thanked Providence when he dropped anchor at last and looked once more, to see four little ships in a string behind him still.

BEFORE dawn the storm died down a little—not enough for comfort but enough for safety's sake. He ordered the anchors up at once and steamed away before the crews of the stranded Russian ships could recognize him, or tell the direction that he took. And before midday he steamed into sight of Astrabad Bay with the oil in his bunkers running low, and with a seasick crew, but with his bare red head held high, and his extraordinary eyes ablaze with knowledge that he had more than lanced Russia—he had driven her from her own sea, battered, and bruised, and sunk her ships, drowned he did not know how many of her men and utterly disheartened more of them. Lanced Russia? He had gored her wide open! He had given her and her ruthless advance a setback she would not recover from for months!

"Run the boats ashore outside the bay!" he ordered. "Then blow them up. Let the engineers and crew bring their things ashore, but keep them prisoners—they'll be useful in an hour or two. Andry!"

"Yes, Mr. Dicky."

"Lower a boat, and take the orders back to the rest of them!"

"Aye-aye!"

VIII

SINCE the storm still raged and nobody expected him or anybody else by water, and since he beached the five gunboats outside the bay, Dick landed in Persia again unseen; and he took the precaution of sending half his forces in front of him before blowing up the ships. They pounced on men who were busy trying to repair the wires cut by Dick's orders. Not a shot was fired; the men threw their hands up and surrendered.

So, news of his coming was reported in Astrabad by the roar of five explosions, and by that time Dick had, in all, nearly two hundred prisoners. He marched them to the row of wagons on the hillside and then sent a mounted man to the city with a flag of truce and word that he was willing to exchange.

"Exchange what?" asked the Princess, crumpling in her fist the note that Dick had sent her. She had kept it because she meant to make him eat it before he died.

"Your sailors and telegraphists against our forty-three!" the man said. "Deek *bahadur* says our forty-three have had punishment enough!"

She hesitated. For a moment the thought flashed across her mind to have the man seized and beaten before being sent back; but second thoughts seemed better and she smiled, seeming to the man far fairer than the *houris* he had heard about who wait for good Moslems in Mohammed's paradise.

"Tell him I will treat with him direct!" she answered. "Tell him I will ride out with my maid and no other escort to meet him half-way; let him bring one, and I will talk with him. If he refuses, I will not exchange!"

The man rode back with her message, and Dick frowned. He wanted to be off—to hurry away to the aid of Usbeg Ali—to help the Afghan finish the siege and to bring him the news of Russia's worsting on the Caspian. He did not want two hundred prisoners to tire his men and keep the horses at a walk; and he did want his forty-three back. He had no love for them; in his opinion they were murderers who richly deserved punishment; but it seemed to him that if he could get hold of them again they would serve for a good warning to the rest. Mercy, too, had more than a little to do with his decision; his shoulders tingled as he thought of what the Russians might be doing to them.

"Ride back!" he ordered. "Tell her I will come and meet her half-way, with one man, provided she shows my forty-three alive outside the wall first. Wait! Take a Russian with you. Make her a present of him! He will tell his version of the situation! Go!"

So with a Russian up behind him, the man cantered back, and for the second time the Princess Olga Karageorgovich met him at the gate and parleyed. The Russian talked loud of what had happened, and he was overheard by Russians inside the gate who were in no mood to stomach any more feminine mismanagement. It was they who brought the forty-three, and they who insisted on sending them to Dick whether he exchanged or not. They argued they were lucky if Dick did not sack the town.

So the Princess made a virtue of necessity and rode out with her maid, followed at a distance by Dick's forty-three. Dick called Andry and rode out to meet her; the huge man chose to walk, but the horse went none too fast for him. Andry's eyes were on a dark blue dress, that never was fashioned in Russia, and the wearer of it, whose seat on a horse was not so very much superior to his own. He hurried.

Dick did not dismount; nor did he notice Andry. He touched his forehead, since he wore no hat, and then met the Princess eye to eye. Hers were deep violet, and they glowed; but nobody ever knew what color his were. She lowered her eyes first.

"Is this a decent note to send to a lady?" she asked in French, holding out the piece of paper from Dick's memorandum book, that he had given to the gunner-major.

"I never wrote an indecent line in my life to anybody," answered Dick.

"Decent to send to me?"

Dick's eyes were looking beyond her now, at something that was happening behind her horse.

"Decent to send to me who befriended you in spite of every outrage until this last one—until you turned your back on me and left me to deal with a rabble single-handed—is any of your conduct ever decent, Dick?"

Dick smiled. He was still looking past her, and she was growing conscious of the fact.

" 'These men are murderers,' " she read, " 'and this officer has done his best to kill me. I can imagine no worse fate for either than to trust them to your tender mercy. Do your best, or worst. Dick Anthony.' Is that a decent letter, Dick?"

"What's the matter with it?" Dick asked. "How did you treat them? Look at them!"

He could have bitten his tongue off the next instant, for she turned before he meant her too, and—saw.

She saw Andry, and there was little else to see because the man was huge, and Marie Mouquin's inches were all smothered in his vast embrace. But there was an empty saddle that explained things; and a whisp of hair hung over Andry's shoulder that most surely was not his.

"Have you a chaplain in Astrabad?" asked Dick.

The Princess smiled sweetly as an angel; so Dick knew he might expect new deviltry.

"Do you suppose," she asked, "that I will allow my maid to run off to a bandit's lair in the mountains with that horror of a giant of yours? She will return with me, monsieur the chief of bandits!"

Dick noticed that she had ceased to call him "king," and felt relieved to that extent. But he was fretting inwardly. His iron code of honor would not have allowed him to take any advantage of a flag of truce, and if she insisted on her maid returning with her there would be nothing left for it but to take the town. And he had a vague, uncomfortable thought of what the maid's fate might be in the meantime.

"Andry!" he said sternly.

The giant set the maid on her feet and stood upright. The girl sobbed as she drew her first long breath in minutes.

"Get to your place behind me!"

Andry stared hard—at Dick—at the girl—at Dick. Dick shut his lips tight and said nothing. The Princess grinned. It suited her finely to see Dick disobeyed by the man she knew he trusted more than anybody in the world.

"Heigho! D'ye hear that, lassie?" asked Andry with a sheepish smile. "I maun leave ye. He's callin'!"

He did not kiss her again nor look at her, but cracked his heels together, faced his front, and marched military-wise until he reached Dick's rear, where he faced about and waited.

"Now," said Dick. "We are here to exchange prisoners. I offer all I hold of your men against my forty-three you have brought out with you."

"Take your forty-three!" she said, glancing back and motioning them forward with her arm.

The poor devils were so sore and famished they could scarcely begin to march, but they dragged themselves forward and each touched the earth as he passed Dick.

Dick waved his arms in a prearranged signal and the Russian prisoners began to file out in a long line from behind the wagons. He waited, sitting his horse in silence but watching the Princess out of the corner of his eye, until the procession reached them and had passed on toward the city.

"That ends the parley, then!" said the Princess.

"Since you say so," answered Dick.

"Then, take that, sir!"

She plunged her hand into her breast and drew a knife. She poised it—aimed it for ten seconds while Dick sat and smiled at her—and hurled it at him. But he ducked and the knife went whizzing past Andry's head as the big man rushed forward to protect his master.

"So, the parley's over, is it?" laughed Dick.

He looked down at the flag of truce that she had flung to the earth. Her horse was standing on it. He tossed his own down and laughed. She screamed, for she knew a turn of events was coming that she was not strong enough to cope with. She wheeled her horse and spurred him; but Dick seized her rein, and she looked up into his eyes again flashing her hate of him but conscious of the fact that she was at his mercy.

"My man Andry wants your maid," smiled Dick, "and she seems to want him. So he's going to have her."

The Princess stared up at Dick, but she did not answer. Of all the unexpected statements that could leave Dick's lips, this surely was the most amazing. That Dick—the height of propriety and stickler for full meed of courtesy to women, should allow his follower to take a lone woman back to camp was unbelievable. She scarcely believed her ears. She waited for the next amazement.

"But it wouldn't be proper, would it, for him to take her off alone, since you haven't a Scottish minister, and he would rather be single than be married by a Russian priest? Now, would it?"

She did not answer. Her head was

reeling. Did she love Dick after all? Did he love her? This marvel of a man who could take a little string of gunboats and drive the Russian Caspian fleet off its own closed sea—could anybody help but love him?

"She needs a chaperon," said Dick.

"Dick! What d'you mean?"

Dick recognized the new note in her voice, and his own changed instantly. He was willing to reward a loyal servant, and to rescue the little maid from the Princess. He meant to do it. But he was in no mood for love-making with a murderess—with a political she-fiend who had used her power and secret sinful influence to trap him.

"I mean exactly what I say! Take your girl, Andry!"

More amazed than even the Princess had been, Andry stepped forward and obeyed.

"Come on!"

Dick seized the Princess' bridle-rein and started back toward where his own men waited. She tried to throw herself from the saddle, but he seized her round the waist; and since Andry's girl would follow him without persuasion the giant left her, to stride beside the Princess' horse.

"You vixen!" Dick called her; and that was the hardest thing he had ever called a woman to her face. "You gave all your trumps away when you threw that knife at me! You'll come now to the mountains and protect your maid's good name!"

She did not answer. She was dumb with rage and fear. It had been one thing to want to run away with Dick when she loved him and her power was at its zenith; but it was another now to be carried off by him when all her other plans had failed and the Okhrana was probably no longer at her back. Had Dick loved her, her position even now would have been endurable. But he hated her. So she lay back in his arms and cursed him and all Asia between set teeth. Dick rode with her at a walk until he reached the barricade.

"Now, burn those wagons!" he ordered. "Hurry!"

Within ten minutes the long line of wood and wheels was all ablaze, and the Princess looked past it at the Caspian, beyond whose waves was Russia and the world of intrigue and luxury she loved. Her eyes were wet, but Dick laid a hand on her arm and called her.

"Come!" he said simply. Then turning to his men, he shouted at them, "Forward! Ride! Ride to the aid of Usbeg Ali Khan!"

Dick rode first with the Princess. Last rode Andry, and another. The giant was happy on a horse for the first time in his history—too happy to be aware of the saddle that chafed his knees.

"Ye're a bonny, leal lassie," he kept grinning; and the maid kept busy trying to translate it into French.

The next adventure of *Dick Anthony of Arran* will appear complete in the next issue.

The next *Miss Dem.* story, "Spangles and Soapsuds," will appear in the next issue (January).

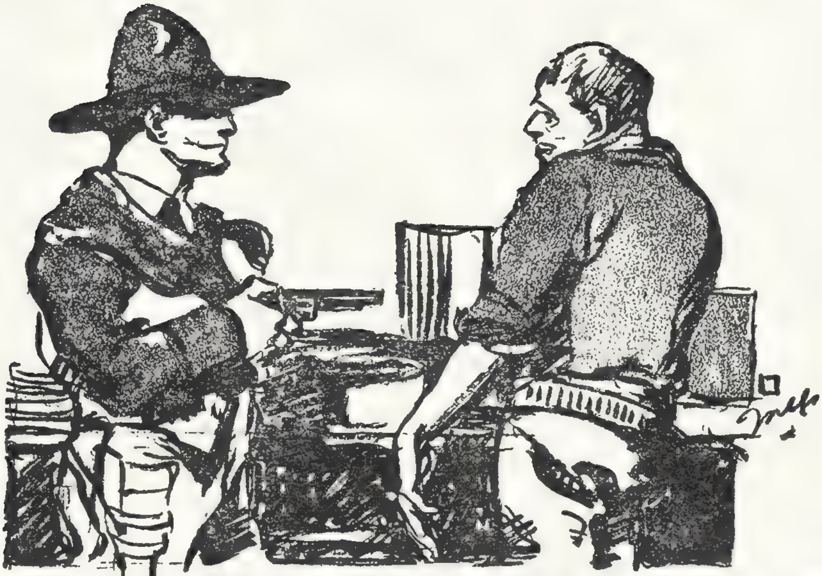
MISSING

BY A. JUDSON HANNA

A BLARE of ghoulish winds, and night;
The stars have gone out overhead;
Leagues upon leagues of seething white,
And one small splotch of red.

Gray dawn; soft, melting winds ablow.
The starved wolf stretches in his bed,
Creeps forth to gaze across the snow,
And sees—a splotch of red.

Two troopers of the Mounted force,
Searching for one reported dead,
Found the white ruins of a horse
Beside a coat of red.



IMMEDIATE LEE

by KENNETH B. CLARKE

IT WAS because of his characteristic manner of shooting that he became known as "Immediate" Lee. The West blotted out the name his mother had given him—a formidable, academic name—and attached a tersely descriptive label in her own language, that men might deal with him advisedly. Judged by the Western standard of accuracy he did not shoot well. But he shot quick—quick, even as the West computes time in the matter of drawing a gun.

For instance, in the killing of Dan Shattuck. The making of a cigarette had progressed to the point where the tobacco flakes lay loosely upon the paper when it became necessary to shoot Dan, for Dan's gun was poised vertically, tensely ready for the throw-down. Lee drew and fired, and put up before the dead man moved; and not any of the tobacco was spilled as he held the paper in his other hand. It was a very dainty death.

Immediate Lee dealt only with the essentials of life; these he acquired or disbursed with incisive directness. The consequent saving of time permitted a leisurely nicety of action which marked the man with distinction.

The spot on the ace is not an essential attainment in a land where all men shoot straight. A card's face is not larger than a man's wrist or heart or the space between the eyes; therefore accuracy is served in merely hitting the card.

Others had been honored with handles appropriate to some peculiarity of appearance, or in recognition of the state that had passed them along; such were Shorty Slade and Kentuck Hurley. But in the case of Immediate Lee it was proper that the name, like the man, should bespeak action. The surname, Lee, served to stiffen the descriptive force of the jack-name, as one would say "immediate-ly" with peculiar emphasis. But enough of names!

THE peak of the evening had arrived at King's dance-hall. The games were going; the powdered women and bronzed men were paired off at the little tables, and the smoky, smelly atmosphere of the place was jarred by confused, discordant racketings. Occasionally a pair of saddle-bowed legs lugged some rolling straggler through the open door and up to the bar. Among these came Immediate Lee; but he came quietly, for neither the spread of his saddle nor his mode of drinking had yet sprung the straightness of his legs or deadened the lightness of his step when dismounted. A bottle and a glass were placed before him, unbidden; regularity in his selection made special orders unnecessary.

At one of the near-by small tables the broad back of Kentuck Hurley was turned toward the bar, and opposite him sat Beulah—the slender, dark-haired Beulah—who, among the feminine court at King's, wore her skirts the lowest at the bottom, possibly as an atonement to delicacy for the unrestraint expressed in her bodice.

Hurley was making rough work of his drinking; his hairy fist clutched the bottle ponderously and poured vaguely; his lowered head protruded stiffly from his shoulders, and his eyes focused heavily. He was no longer interesting, and the dark-haired Beulah patted frequent yawns between her red lips and fell to dreamily surveying and stroking the engaging curves of her soft white arms.

Aware of his slipping grip, Kentuck Hurley spoke up harshly:

"What's matter? Drink!"

And she drank; but as her lips parted over the glass, her eyes glanced above him and directly into those of Immediate Lee who was leaning at ease with his back to the bar, holding his drink before him. The fine blond head of the man lifted with a smile; the girl's smile sparkled in response; their two glasses rose in salute and they drank to mutual admiration.

Passing a coin to the bar without turning, Immediate Lee strode in a slow circle among the tables and came up to the woman from the side facing Hurley. She waited for him with averted eyes; but when he took one of her hands in his and looped it within his arm she rose and stood beside him.

There was something barbarically fine in the pose of the two tall, lithe, virile figures which was not altogether lost upon the coarser animal who sat beneath them. With suspended resentment he studied the look of quiet domination in the face of the free intruder and the open elation expressed by the woman in her pride as being the selection of this capable, masterly man.

But they both were smiling at him, and many faces at neighboring tables were smiling. He was being made small and cheap, sprawled there over the reek of spilled whisky.

Beulah stooped, gathered the silken skirts at her feet and tugged at the flannel sleeve beneath her hand. Immediate Lee, still looking at the seated figure, raised his brows in added amusement and chuckled softly. Then turning abruptly, he guided his partner toward the crowded passageway, the white shoulders of the girl gleaming in contrast to his somber back.

KENTUCK'S chair scraped harshly and a glass fell with a tinkling crash upon the floor. As he wheeled, Immediate Lee hurled Beulah from him, and, as if trap-doors had opened beneath them, men and women in line with the two men disappeared in a space.

Hurley's gun was out, gripped in the hand hanging at his side; his fingers were white about the stock of it. But he cursed himself for failing to level it as he drew. The other stood with thumb in belt, still smiling, watching the savage mortification raging in the swollen red face. With any other man it was as good as having the drop; with Immediate Lee it was but a shade better than an even break.

The room had knotted into intense silence. The strain of every listening, watching faculty was centered upon the hands of the two men. Hurley's mind was busy with quick calculations of distance, time and placement. His grip slackened a trifle and suddenly the gun felt strangely heavy. He reminded himself that the eyes would tell things before the hand could lift. When the eyes said, "Coming!" Immediate Lee would go to work. Ah—well—the dame wasn't worth it!

Slowly, cautiously the lowered muzzle sought the empty holster and was shoved home with a swaggering lurch.

"Well, take her!" And Hurley spat manfully.

"I did. I thought you noticed it," said Immediate Lee, and he grinned and chuckled again, but not mockingly. One could imagine him laughing in the same way had the girl been taken from him.

A voice in the crowd drawled an insulting comment upon the lack of action, and with laughter and shuffling of feet the gathering went back to play.

KENTUCK HURLEY stopped outside and glared balefully into the starlit night. His pony whinnied at the tie-rail, unnoticed. Through the open door coarse gusts of laughter reached him, and as if each was borne to him with personal significance his jaws corded in bitter animus. He swayed on his heels a little at first, but the clean air of the night refreshed and steadied him.

Presently the project which he had been formulating took definite shape. He went to his saddle, jerked loose his coiled riata and strode up the deserted street, beyond the crowded shacks and on to where an overhanging sycamore darkened the roadway at the edge of the town. There he swung and skilfully threw the hurtling rope several times at an imaginary object; but after three or four trials he impatiently snatched the loop back and muttered.

"Slow, slow. God! Can't I move any more at all?"

Suddenly he stopped coiling the rope, glanced quickly up the road, then knelt in the deep dust. Adjusting the running-noose in a wide circle he laid it out carefully across the beaten trail and covered it with the powdery sand. After roughly erasing his tracks with his hands he stepped back within the shadow of the tree and crouched beside it, waiting.

IT WAS perhaps an hour before anything of further interest to Kentuck Hurley transpired. The leaves of the sycamore muttered drowsily overhead; the night sounds of the bare, stark land contrasted decorously with the man-made clangor in the distance. Finally the song of a lone man singled itself from the unsteady hubbub. It was then that Hurley fingered the rope in his hand and resettled himself against the tree.

> ". . . her throat was like the swan,
> And her face it was the fairest
> That e'er the sun shone on."

To Immediate Lee the tune was not essential—he rendered it with variations; the sentiment was the thing and it made a never-tiring appeal to some spiritual sense within him. "Annie Laurie" was a recognizable part of him, like the shape of his hat. The song came closer and clearer, and it was directly under the sycamore that he concluded, devoutly—

> "And for bonnie A-a-annie Laurie
> I 'ud lay me doon un' dee."

He halted there and cupped a match to a cigarette, with his hands before his face and with arms snugged close before him.

In that moment, like a coiled snake about his feet, the rope ring leaped from the dust and with a stinging "whit" enwrapped his arms and shoulders. Hand over hand Hurley came lunging down the tightened line to pounce upon the convulsed, twisting man whose face furrowed the choking sand in the road. Cinching it tight at the back, Hurley deftly looped the rope and bound the thrashing feet; then he lashed the wrists with the man's neck-scarf. As an added precaution he slipped the gun from the weighted holster, pausing in interest to note the smoothly filed, sightless tip of it before he cast it into the brush.

BESIDE a clump of mesquite Kentuck dropped the bound man from across his saddle and removed the gag.

"You couldn't guess what's goin' to happen to you now, you quick young feller," he remarked derisively. "Could you?"

"Let's have it. I'm all of a twitter," was the drawling reply.

"I don't like the way you laugh. You don't show yer teeth. You grin too damned narrow and modest."

With a swift movement he plunged upon his knees, seized the upturned face with his burly fingers and pressed his own malignant visage snarlingly above it.

"You tin-horn lady-killer!"

He knelt back and leered menacingly down upon the silent, observant figure between his knees while he fumbled in his pocket for a heavy-bladed clasp knife.

"I'm goin' to present you with a real laugh—a nice wide grin, man's size. One you kin take home an' show the folks."

With two quick passes he cut a running gash back from each corner of Lee's mouth, leaving the cheeks divided and quivering.

"Now grin, you coyote! Have a good laugh."

Rising, Hurley gazed stupefied at the white, mutilated object lying in the pale starlight. It sobered him and sickened him with horror. The teeth *did* show.

"Immediate Lee—God!" he whispered, and clambering heavily upon his horse he rode east, and he rode hard.

ABOUT the time that the stitches were taken from Immediate Lee's cheeks, and when he had progressed from a glass tube to fork and spoon, men began to conjecture in greater detail upon the inevitable man-hunt to follow.

All that was known of Kentuck Hurley was that he had gone east. It would be like tracking moccasins on a lava-field. But none doubted that Hurley was as much a marked man as the other was scarred.

The purple markings streaked back from Immediate Lee's mouth not alone altered the man's expression—they made two men of him, exactly opposite in aspect. The left cheek was scarred with a rising cut, strangely quirked at the end and creased about so that one saw a rollicking smile, until the stern, glittering eye above denied it. The right cheek bore a downward furrow, extending the droop-drawn mouth grimly and coarsely, as if a curse had just been twisted from its corner with another already forming. The settlement for that bit of handiwork would be impressive even among the annals of Western retribution.

Lee had nothing to say. He wrote many letters, short letters which evidently called for a reply, for his mail increased perceptibly. Then, all at once, his letters started going west, and the answers, bearing western postmarks, brought a cold gleam into his gaunt eyes.

The big problem of baffling interest came into the small talk at the post-office when he wrote a letter addressed, "Kentucky Hurley, Gila Buttes, Ariz." The postmaster's wife at Gila Buttes, happening to see the corn-pudding color of Hurley's face as he finished reading, also wondered, "What did it say?"

On the day of writing to Hurley, Immediate Lee outfitted lightly and left town by the west trail. And on the day of receiving the letter, Hurley left Gila Buttes by the south trail, circled and rode due north. North from the Buttes the steady, unhastening pursuit followed to the Little Colorado; then east over the New Mexico line to the head-waters of the Pecos; and then wildly the trail ducked and scuttled from town to town and from ranch to ranch.

Kentuck Hurley seldom was in one place longer than a week or ten days. He would no sooner get settled down to some chance job than the usual bunk-house gossip would bring a message of sinister import.

"Guy just up from Wagon Mound says he seen a feller there who cut hisself tryin' to swaller a sword sideways." Or:

"Ever hear of a quick-draw man called Immediate Lee? They say he just come in to Barker's lookin' like he'd ate his way through a glass store-front." And then Hurley would ask for his time, or not, and *vamose.*

The pursuit had followed at an unvarying interval. The words of that letter were beating upon his mind constantly; they were like hot sparks relentlessly consuming a fuse of given length. The letter had said, "Inside of sixty days." And that was a month and a half ago!

AT CORBIN'S Ranch, on Ute Creek, Hurley got a job as cook. He was tired and sick, and the indoor work came as a relief from riding range in the season of northers. His arrival at Corbin's had been accomplished through a dexterous twist in a route which should have taken him elsewhere—a route which, for those whom it might concern, had been described casually, but with subtle plausibility, at the time of his latest departure. Even one reading above and below the line would have followed it. And there was no one at Corbin's known as Kentuck Hurley.

Two weeks passed. A feeling of security—the first in nearly two months—came upon him. The quality of his cooking improved. He could lean in the doorway while the men fed and listen to news from the outside without anxiety in his interest. Again and again he went over the effacement of his trail and believed it faultless.

Then came a night of heavy rain with wind. The warmth and snugness of the cook shack, in contrast to the rough weather outside, produced a sense of isolation and remoteness that was particularly comforting to the man who had been Kentuck Hurley.

He set about cleaning up and hummed a round-up song as he washed the cups and plates. Finally he swabbed off the dish-pan, revolving it upon its edge so that the shiny bottom happened to cast a moving, bright reflection from the lamp. The illumining spot jerked erratically about the wall; then it dropped to the small, low window where it rested and drew attention from the tail of Hurley's eye.

Slowly his glance centered upon it, and there, gleaming ghastly and wet with the rain, was a man's face. The glittering eyes were mirthless and evil, but the mouth, a huge mouth drawn back and upward, smiled inscrutably.

A sharp, chill tremor gripped Hurley's stomach, rose up his spine and overlay his scalp. His lungs tugged for breath. The pan crashed to the floor, dragging a clutter of tin dishes with it.

WHEN Corbin's boys stepped in, Immediate Lee was standing beside Hurley. He faced them calmly and removing his hat he slatted the water from its wide brim:

"Some time ago," he said, "Kentuck, here, prescribed a laugh for me. I just dropped around to show him how it took.

"You boys are friendly to me, as far as I know, but I got to make sure—and Kentuck goes with me."

Afterward none of them could remember seeing more than the flick of Lee's hand to his side.

There sounded the peculiar roar of a forty-four fired indoors, the thin tinkle of a shattered lamp-chimney, and the rattle of a brass lamp-burner as it dropped to the floor in rebound from the wall where the bullet had driven it.

"Shooting in the dark don't slow me up—none," came the quiet drawl of Immediate Lee. "You punchers just stay fixed and we'll keep friends, like I said."

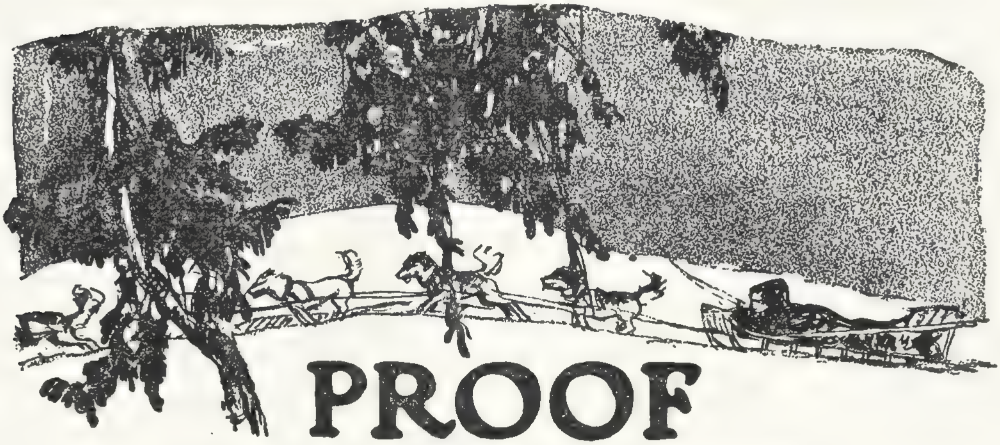
They heard the slow tread of Lee and the scuffling scrape of Hurley's feet cross the floor and pass through the doorway, out into the rain.

In the pitch darkness they were aware of the fidgeting commotion of two horses being mounted with some difficulty. Then the voice of Lee called—

"*Adios*, my friends."

The released tension of the four men within was expressed by a low, spontaneous laugh from one of them and another called back dryly—

"Don't mention it!"



PROOF

by SAMUEL ALEXANDER WHITE

JUST around the first bend of the Dyea Trail above Ten-Mile Cache, which stands beyond Canyon City, Eric Sark threw his weight back upon the gee-pole of his sledge.

"Whoa!" he yelled.

Obediently the five wolf-dogs stopped to rest, the smoke of their breathing clouding heavily through the frosty night. Their red tongues lolled from their panting mouths, and they vigorously shook their bristling manes as if to get rid of the hoar with which their fur was rimmed.

Ahead of and above Sark's outfit the

white-walled Chilkoot path rose up to Sheep Camp, the last depot within the timber-belt until the fireless summit was crossed. Behind and below stretched the rocky defile wherein lay Canyon City and the road he had followed, straggling across Dyea Flats from the ice-piled shore of Dyea Inlet.

The mountain world about him was very still. No wind moaned down the Pass. The ancient peaks poised like ivory carvings against the searchlight flare of the borealis. While he rested, the only sound to break the primal calm was the huh-ha-huh-ha-huh-ha-huh of the dogs and the hammering of his own heart. Then, as he grasped the gee-pole to mush on again, there came the shrill sound of sledge-runners on the beaten trail, and the muffled whine of punished dogs.

Sark paused and looked back curiously.

Around the bend flashed another sledge, drawn by five lean malemiuts and driven by a seeming lunatic. The seeming lunatic lay face down, holding on to the sledge with his left hand and plying the whip with his right. The wind of his going had blown back his parka-hood so that it flapped uselessly on his shoulders. But the man did not appear to know or care. He bore on, bare-headed, through the frost, the brilliant aurora playing oddly upon his yellow hair, his white, strained face, and upon a bloody scar that reached across his temple.

"What in thunder's chasing you?" yelled Sark as the other neared him in his frenzied gallop. "Pull up, can't you? Pull up! Are you deaf? And blind? Can't you see the trail's too narrow to——"

The rest of Sark's words were smothered in the crash. The racing outfit hit his standing one with the speed of a locomotive. Both sleds, both men and both teams rolled over and over in the side-snow. Snarling and snapping viciously, the ten wolf-dogs gave indiscriminate battle in the traces.

Sark spat out a mouthful of snow as he got to his knees.

"You locoed gink!" he sputtered. "What in blazes is the matter with you? Drunk? Or just bughouse?"

For answer the yellow-haired man swung his whip butt fair upon Sark's temple, and Sark promptly fell back again into the side-snow. The blow dazed him for a little, yet he did not lose consciousness, and all the while he lay helpless in the drifts he was aware that his attacker was kicking and beating the dogs to straighten them out in the harness. And as his strength came back, Sark floundered erect in time to see the yellow-haired man speeding down the trail as madly as he had sped up. Before the wolf-dogs disappeared, Sark sensed something familiar in their long lope. He stared at them, then at the team attached to the overturned sledge beside him.

"Hold on!" he commanded, running a few strides after the yellow-haired one. "Our teams are mixed. You've got the wrong one."

Nevertheless, as before, the wild man paid no heed. His sledge heeling over on one runner, he took the turn and vanished.

CALLING down a thousand anathemas upon the head of the other, Sark ran back to the overturned sled. He swiftly righted it and hauled around the five lean malemiuts to give chase, but, as they strained to their places in the harness, he saw that the traces had parted in the collision. At once he re-anchored the sledge and feverishly began to repair the broken leathers, splicing them and tightly binding the splices with cord. The work took some minutes. Several times he paused to wipe away the blood which ran down into his eyes from the welt on his temple and interfered with his sight.

As he finished and once more whirled the malemiuts into line, the shriek of sledge-runners sounded a second time around the bend. Half-a-dozen sledges, tailing each other and going at full gallop, broke into view. At sight of Sark the drivers of the outfits raised a great outcry and mercilessly plied their whips.

"More locoed ginks, eh?" Sark growled at them. "But I've had my lesson. Nobody runs over me this time."

His own whip cracked, urging the malemiuts off the trail into the side-snow. Yet his move was of no avail. The six sleds swerved after his and six teams overrode his own.

Sark, managing to leap clear of the tangle, shook his whip angrily in the faces of the six drivers who rolled off and stumbled toward him.

"Say," he exploded, "when it comes to good-nature, I'm as good-natured as the next man. But repetitions rile me. And you men are certainly repeating."

"Shut up!" ordered the big gray-bearded man who had led the rush of the six sleds. "We don't want your guff. We want you."

"What for?"

"Stealing our stuff from Ten-Mile Cache. You drop that dog-whip."

Sark held on to it.

"Look here——" he began.

"You drop that dog-whip."

The gray-bearded man waved a hand to the others, and, as with a single movement, five rifles leaped out from under their sled lashings to the level of their hips.

Sark quickly dropped the whip.

"Say, men, any asylum on this trail?" he asked.

The gray-bearded one gazed at him sharply.

"No! Why?"

"I thought maybe there might be and its contents running loose. I got balled up with one crazy man a few minutes ago. Now here's six more."

"Hassing," ordered the man with the gray beard, ignoring Sark's sarcasm, "better take his gun."

"Taken it is, Clavin," nodded Hassing, a squat, red-faced fellow, stepping forward and pulling another rifle from the sledge to which the five malemiuts were hitched.

"You're welcome to it," grinned Sark. "It isn't mine."

"No, and the bacon and beans and flour ain't yours, either," sneered Hassing, kicking the bags upon the sledge.

"No they're not! And if you ask me, the sled and the malemiuts aren't mine. Even the darned dog-whip isn't mine."

"Must say you're all-fired candid, stranger," cut in Clavin. "But I guess you know there's no use trying to fool us."

"You're sure I'm your robber?"

"Sure as hanging, stranger."

"And don't I get a chance to clear myself?"

"All the chance in the world—at Ten-Mile Cache. That's where the stuff belongs and that's where we're going on the jump. We've been laying for you three cold nights now, and all Canyon City's getting mighty anxious about you."

As Sark was whirled down the slope again, sitting sandwiched between Clavin and Hassing upon the front sled, his feeling was one of amusement. But amusement gave way to serious thought, and that to anxiety and positive foreboding when he reached Ten-Mile Cache and saw the crowd awaiting him with a suggestive coil of rope in their hands. The news had gone forth in Canyon City that the six men set to watch the Cache were chasing the thief up the mountain. One rifle-shot had been heard, and men had run out in throngs to await the return of Clavin and the rest.

IT WAS a motley, hard-bitten mob of frontiersmen, clad in parkas, mackinaws, coonskin, and bearskin, that surged about the sled whereon Sark rode. All scowled at him. Many spat toward him. Some even tried to pull him away from his custodians, Clavin and Hassing.

"String him up!" was the universal cry. "String him up right now! What's the use of waiting and gassing round?"

But Clavin shouted down the impulsive mob.

"Don't make cussed fools of yourselves!" he advised. "Miners' law's the same as any law. You got to take evidence and prove a man guilty before you can do any punishing under it. Stand back and come to order. Light a fire. And appoint a chairman."

At once a huge fire of dead spruce was kindled.

And at once the position of chairman was thrust upon Clavin himself.

Clavin stood upon a sledge in the snow and, before the throng crowding into the firelight, stated the charge against the prisoner. Then he called Hassing as the first witness.

"Tonight for the third time we was lying in the spruce back of the Cache," began Hassing, "to get the skunk as was taking our stuff. 'Twas mighty cold and nothing doing till 'long about midnight. Then we see something moving and we crawled up. But the skunk was leery. He seen us as soon as we seen him, and he jumped for the sled he had piled full of stuff and hit the trail up the mountain. I was nearest, and I cracked at him once. He fell off the sled, got up and jumped on again. Ball just grazed him." He paused significantly and pointed a finger at Sark's temple, showing bloody under the edge of his parka-hood. "Chased him then and got him red-handed with the goods on him—just around the first bend."

Hassing ceased abruptly and slouched

aside. Clavin called upon his four companions in turn. Their testimony, as bald as Hassing's, was but corroboration of Hassing's. Next the contents of Sark's sled was judicially examined and the stolen sacks of flour, bacon and beans duly identified by the owners. Finally Clavin called on the accused.

"Stranger," he observed, "you was aching up at the bend for a chance to clear yourself. Now's your chance. Go to it!"

SARK stood up, a dark, gigantic figure against the flames.

"I can't say as I've evidence to offer," he testified. "I've only a white man's word. But it's God's truth when I say I'm not the man you chased. Your man was a yellow-haired man with his parka hood off and a bloody welt on his forehead. He blew up behind me when I stopped to breathe my dogs around the bend. Drove bang into me, upset me and whacked me over the head with the butt of his whip. He queered me a minute and before I could get to him he was sifting down again with my outfit."

"And left you his own?" cross-examined Hassing, who by common consent assumed the pose of lawyer for the prosecution. "Golly, stranger, can't you figure out some better tale than that? We didn't meet Mr. Imaginary Man. And he'd sure come back to meet us, wouldn't he, considering we wanted to see him so bad?"

"He did, I tell you."

"We didn't meet him, I tell you."

"Then he left the trail before he got to you."

"Couldn't do it, stranger. Couldn't leave the trail between the Cache and the bend. Ask any one in the crowd. It's all straight rock-wall on one side, and there's been a snow-slide hanging hair-triggered for thirty-six hours on the other. No sane man would sneak out and hide under a slide. And if he had sneaked out, he'd have brought down the slide. I tell you no sane man would try it."

"But this man wasn't sane. He was scared insane, or mighty near it. And by the look on his face he'd have taken a chance on the mouth of Hell itself."

Thus Hassing and Sark continued arguing back and forth till the chairman broke in on them.

"You got to produce this yellow-haired fellow you talk about, before he counts," he told Sark.

"How in thunder can I?" demanded the latter. "If he didn't run into you, he must have got away."

"Got away? Where? Pah! Don't throw such a fairy tale at us. Got any more evidence?"

"Yes. I want to tell you who I am and explain my movements. My name's Sark—Eric Sark. I haven't been many hours on this trail. You say whoever robbed the Cache tonight has been at it all along. You say this is the third night you've laid for him. Well, that puts me out of the running. I struck Dyea this afternoon."

"Oh, you did, eh?" interposed Hassing. "Well, that's something to go on. To prove whether you're lying or not, all we got to do is to look at the passenger list of the steamer you come on. What boat was it?"

"No boat. I'm fresh from the peak of British Columbia. By dog-sled off the Tatshenshini River."

"Aw, shucks! That's as bad as the yellow-haired story. If you ain't appeared through regular channels, who's to identify you? Who's to prove you came that way?"

"I don't know," admitted Sark.

"Then neither do we," Hassing scoffed.

"Any more evidence?" inquired Clavin, impatiently.

"Only that my dogs weren't malemiuts. They were MacKenzie River huskies. And my name was on my packs."

"Well, if that's all, I guess we'll take the vote," concluded Clavin. "Them as believes Sark's guilty line up on the far side of the fire. Them as believes him innocent stay on his side."

In a compact body the crowd shifted to the farther side.

WHEN the movement ceased, a solitary man was left sitting upon his dog-sled on Sark's side.

"Mighty near unanimous!" Clavin commented, glowering at the solitary man. "You voting for the prisoner, Tom Bassett?"

Bassett heaved up his thick-set body and turned a sharp-featured face upon the chairman.

"I sure am, Clavin. And do you savvy why? Because Sark told such a thundering poor tale! If it had been a lie, it would have been all frilled up fit to blind a judge and jury. But it wasn't. And such a danged thin story can't be anything but true."

"But we got circumstantial evidence that says otherwise," declaimed Clavin. "We got the proof. You can't get over proof."

"Clavin, if you live as long in the North as I have, you'll find out different. You'll find out there's things true as can't be proved true. And I'll be shot and bludgeoned if here isn't one of them. Sark's story sure sounds true to me. Besides," turning round to the prisoner, "I like his looks. What's more, I like his voice. It rings right. Partner, I want to shake with you and go right on record here as believing you wouldn't steal a bloody bean!"

"Thanks, Bassett," returned Sark simply. "I'm glad there's one man in the gang ready to talk that way."

He reached out his hand to shake, and was promptly flung face down upon Bassett's sled by a violent jerk of Bassett's arm.

"Hold tight!" whispered Bassett, falling on top of him and using his whip on his team as he fell.

Like a thunderbolt the team sprang away under the lash and dashed up the trail.

SO RAPID and so unexpected was Bassett's move that his sled had gained a great lead before the crowd even made a break. Then, uttering furious cries, the men jumped for their own outfits. But the denseness of the crowd hampered free movement of teams and sleds. There were several jams before the chase was fairly started, and the lost minutes caused by those jams allowed Bassett and Sark to near the bend as their pursuers topped the first hog-back above the Cache.

Looking down, the two saw a string of pitching sledges and undulating husky-backs writhing up the mountain-side. Above the string waved bushy tails and snake-like whips, and the shouts of the drivers rolled in a thunderous roar.

"We got to make it, Sark!" Bassett kept reiterating through teeth clenched against the hurtling wind of their passage. "We got to make the slide before they come up. Then we'll get clear away over the Pass. Savvy?"

"Sure," answered Sark, his mouth opening with the pop of an uncorked bottle. "Wonder the yellow-haired fellow didn't think of that! But I guess the think was all scared out of him. Don't spare the whip, Bassett!"

Bassett flayed his huskies cruelly, and in a dozen more leaps the team reached the bend. There was no time to waste in whoaing the animals. Going at full speed, Sark and Bassett simply flung themselves off sidewise, at the same time jerking the sledge over on its side so that it plowed a great furrow to its own anchorage.

By the time it stopped, the two men were a hundred yards along the lip of the canyon which ran at an angle to the bend. They were continually feeling the rocks as they ran, and with one accord they abruptly stopped at a loose boulder. It was a huge, ice-scoured ball, balanced by some Titan's hand upon the canyon edge. Sark and Bassett put shoulders to it, heaved and stepped swiftly back. Leaping and quivering like a live thing, the missile plunged downward. It struck the first enormous bosses of the snow-slide with a weight of many tons. The far-stretching cornice of the slide curled over like a mile-long comber and, as a comber rushes shoreward, rushed down the canyon side.

The drivers of the pursuing sleds saw it coming. They wheeled in their tracks and frantically whipped back to safety over the hog-back above Ten-Mile Cache.

"That puts the stopper on them," exulted Bassett, watching. "No catching us now. They can't bring dog teams over that stuff. And our trail's clear ahead. We better be hitting it, Sark!"

"Wait, by thunder!" exclaimed Sark, suddenly halting him. "What's that going down? Look!—when the Northern Lights flash—between the slide rock and the tangle of spruce logs!"

They stared at the breast of the whizzing slide, and the aurora, flaming abruptly, painted darkly against the white the outlines of a man, five huskies, and a sled. Like a phantom dog-train it seemed, riding a ghost-trail through snow-swept space; but, when it hit a felled pine-tree, careened and came to rest upon the crest of the hog-back above Ten-Mile Cache, Sark and Bassett knew it for a material-outfit.

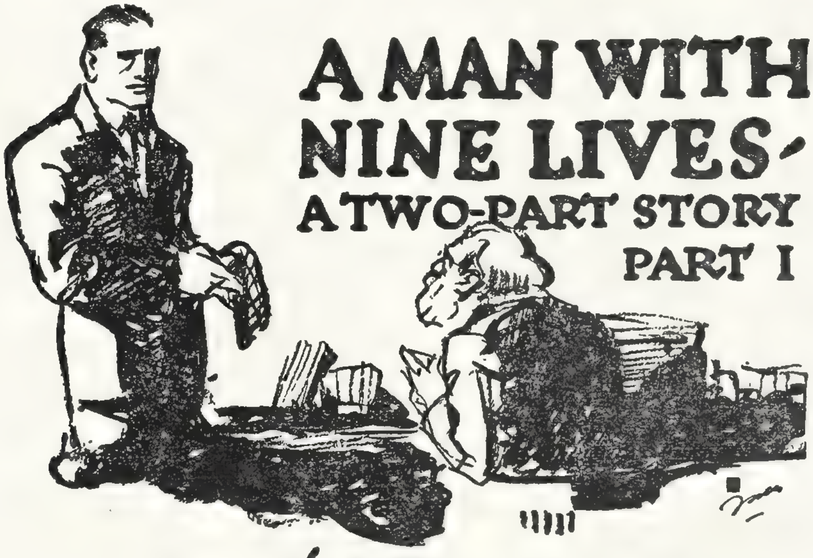
They both turned and for a grim moment looked mutely into each other's eyes. Then, leaving their team and speeding on their snowshoes, they dashed down over the chaos of snow, rocks and tangled logs that choked the whole trail from the hog-back to the bend.

They arrived at the hog-back before the men below had mounted, ran along the crest and halted beside the motionless sled. The packs were gone, but the man lay on his back across the sled, his white face, marred by a bloody welt over the temple, turned up to the stars, his mop of yellow hair hanging down to the snow. The dogs, big MacKenzie River huskies, likewise lay upon their backs, humped in grotesque attitudes among the twisted harness.

"Slide rock got them!" breathed Sark, finally. "It's certain as dynamite when it starts. Look at his legs and the legs of my poor beggars of dogs. He sure took a desperate chance, Bassett, hiding out under an avalanche!"

"Sure desperate," agreed Bassett solemnly. "But still, if you figure it out, Sark, your chance ten minutes ago was just the same as his.

"Say," and he whirled toward Clavin, Hassing, and the rest who showed heads and shoulders as they ran up the slope, "talk about your circumstantial evidence! Talk about your proof! Come here and we'll show you something transcending proof!"



A MAN WITH NINE LIVES

A TWO-PART STORY

PART I

by RICHARD MARSH

CHAPTER I

SOLE RESIDUARY LEGATEE

"HAVE you ever heard how I first made the acquaintance of Mr. Jerningham Creed?"

The lawyer shook his head. A smile wrinkled his lips as if for some reason he found the earnestness with which Mr. Adair put the question amusing.

"It's a queer story. Then the whole thing has been a queer story—and it seems as if the queerest part of it was still to come."

Adair had got up from his seat and was wandering about the room. Now, suddenly returning to the table, he leaned over it toward the lawyer.

"When I first met Creed I was starving—perhaps you find that amusing. You seem to have your own ideas of amusement."

Mr. Foster smiled again, tapping the table with the edge of a sheaf of blue papers.

"The truth is, Mr. Adair, that in a sort of general sense I find the whole thing amusing. Surely you and Creed were never made for each other. The whole thing seems incongruous. I can't see you associated—especially with this at the end of it."

With his blue papers he directed the other's attention to a sheet of parchment which lay open in front of him. Adair eyed the speaker in silence, then continued:

"It was past one o'clock on a February night, or rather morning. I had hung about the Strand till after closing time, hoping that fortune might send me—well, I'll say a crust of bread. It didn't; so after the public-houses had closed, and the street was cleared, I went down to the Embankment.

"It wasn't nice weather. There was a pretty cool wind, and I was in a state which made it seem cooler. Rain had been falling, and a mist was rising from the river—cheerful climatic conditions for a man who proposed to get a little sleep on a seat by the water.

"I dare say it was because I was so hungry that I felt as if I were chilled to the bone. I marched along the pavement, slapping myself with my arms, trying to get some of the ice out of my body.

"As I was nearing Waterloo I had a little adventure. I had noticed an elderly man in front of me, walking alone. Suddenly there came toward him from across the road three individuals. One went for him from behind, another from the front; the third began to put his hands all over him."

"They were robbing him, you mean?"

"It looked uncommonly like it. It was no business of mine. And when a man gets where I had, principles of abstract morality don't worry him. But an idea occurred to me. If I tackled those three gentlemen the exercise might make me warm. So I went for them hammer and tongs; and they—after two or three lively moments—took to their heels without giving me quite so much exercise as I had been inclined to hope they would."

The lawyer interposed with an inquiry.

"How tall are you? You seem to me to be a sort of understudy for a giant, which makes it so odd that you should have occupied the position you did."

"I'm rather under six foot two, and I suppose that February morning I was trained about as fine as I could be. Neither of those three gentlemen could use their fists, and exercise of that kind wasn't to their liking.

"I was left alone with the old gentleman. Perhaps it was because they had not left him in a very cheerful condition that he seemed not over disposed to be civil. 'Are you another of the robbers?' were the first words he addressed to me.

"I explained to him that I wasn't. He looked me up and down as well as he could, and then remarked, 'if you will see me home I'll give you twopence.' It was a generous offer, with which I closed. I escorted him to his chambers in Mitre Court.

"He had another good look at me as he handed me the twopence at the street door, and he said: 'My name is Jerningham Creed. I'm on the second floor; you'll see my name on the board. If you'll come to see me at half past nine o'clock I may have something to say to you.' I went at half past nine and—he offered me the position of clerk!"

"That must have been a rather curious interview. I should like to have seen it."

"It was rather by way of curiosity, the first interview I had with Mr. Jerningham Creed. When I got into the room he looked at me all round and all over as if I were some oddity he had paid money to see. Then he remarked, 'You're a gentleman,' and presently added, 'without five shillings worth of clothing.'

"I told him that I trusted his second statement was incorrect. I hoped that if I offered my wardrobe for sale I should get more for it than five shillings, since what I was wearing represented everything I had in the world.

"Then he asked me questions. I answered some of them, some of them I told him were no business of his. Just as I expected that he was going to ask me to take myself off, and perhaps give me sixpence, he observed:

" 'I'll make you my clerk, and I'll pay you thirty shillings a week. You can begin this morning. I'll give you a note to a man I know, who sells second-hand clothing; he'll give you some better clothes than those you have on, and I'll deduct the price of them from your salary.' Before I had quite realized the situation I was calling on the man he knew."

"You don't mean to say that he was able to fit you out of stock?"

"He wasn't—that was the trouble. He had garments which he said had been made for a gentleman who was all of six foot; but I fancy that must have been a short six foot, because they were inclined to be sketches on me. However, as Mr. Creed's clerk, I lived in those garments for three months and flourished exceedingly."

"What sort of work did you do? His must have been such—shall I say, funny work."

"Foster, I writhe when I think of it. When I realized what his trade was I was disposed to do what those three individuals had done under the shadow of Waterloo Bridge—cut and run."

"I don't think I'm libeling my late client when I say that I always understood he was a usurer of the very worst type."

"YOU are not; you understood quite correctly. He lent lodging-house keepers ten pounds on a hundred pounds' worth of furniture, and charged two guineas for expenses; young gentlemen twenty-five pounds on a bill for a hundred at three months, having first got them to sign an affidavit that they had never borrowed money before and were over twenty-one."

"I know some stories about Mr. Creed—everybody does. What I wonder is what sort of work you did for him."

"Don't talk of it. He had me under his thumb like every one else with whom he had dealings. He debited me with five pounds for those clothes he bought, and I never succeeded in working it off—that's a fact. In some mysterious way the debt kept increasing.

"I could give you some figures which would certainly provide you with amusement. I worked for Jerningham Creed nearly two years. When he paid me my last week's salary I signed an entry in a little book he kept which showed that I owed him seven pounds eighteen and sixpence. He was a wonderful man."

"I take it that you're not a very good man of business, Mr. Adair."

"I'm not. I have no pretensions of the kind. Creed used to say that that was one of my attractions in his eyes; but if I'd been an excellent man of business I doubt if it would have made any difference in my dealings with him. The thing was not to deal with him—there alone safety lay.

"I imagine, Mr. Adair, that yours must be rather an interesting story. I imagine you never set out in life with the idea of becoming a money-lender's clerk?"

"I did not, but I got there all the same; and if I hadn't, goodness only knows where I should have got."

"Do you mind my speaking frankly to you, Mr. Adair?"

The lawyer was turning his papers over as if not particularly anxious, for the moment, to meet the other's glance.

"Not at all. You'll not be the first man who's done that, Foster."

"You say you didn't know what was in this will of his?"

"I have said so; if you like I'll say so again. I'd no more idea than you had; you say you had none at all."

"I was not, in the ordinary course, Mr. Creed's legal adviser, as you know, Mr. Adair. His business was done by solicitors who—do that kind of business. But one day he brought me this box."

The lawyer touched a dispatch-box which stood on his table.

"It was locked and sealed. He told me to keep it till he fetched it away again, or till he died. In the latter event I was to open it within twenty-four hours of the news of his decease having reached me, and act upon the instructions it contained.

"In it, as you are aware, I found his will; and what purported to be a schedule of his possessions drawn up, as he explains, to avoid an unnecessary bill of costs when declaring the estate for probate. By this will—which is in his own handwriting and was drawn up less than three months ago, it was signed and completed two days before he brought the dispatch-box to me—he leaves everything to you unconditionally. Have you any idea why he should have done so?"

"No more than you have, Mr. Foster. He certainly never showed himself too well disposed towards me."

"It's odd, under those circumstances, that he should have left everything to you. Can you conceive of any special reason why he should have done so? Had he an intimate acquaintance with your private history?"

"So far as I know he had not. After that first morning he asked me no questions; I should not have answered them if he had. My private history is—private."

"I take it that your name is Adair?"

There was perhaps a momentary hesitation before the other answered.

"You may, Mr. Foster. My name is Adair—Martin Adair." The lawyer's eyes were now raised, and were observing the speaker keenly. "The most Argus-like glances can not alter facts, Mr. Foster."

"You would have noticed, Mr. Adair, that the wording of the will is rather odd; it was not drawn up by a lawyer, though a sound enough legal document. The testator says that he leaves everything to the person known to him as Martin Adair—as if he had reason to doubt that your name was Adair."

"I did notice that; I'm not altogether unobservant."

"So you see whether your name is or is not Adair makes no difference; you still inherit!"

"Exactly. That is what I gathered."

"Another odd point is that when Mr. Creed brought this box to me he hinted that within three months he'd either fetch it back again or—be dead."

"That almost suggests that he must have had the prophetic eye."

"But he can hardly have anticipated that inside three months he would be murdered!"

"Have you anything to show that? He might have had private reasons of his own on which such an anticipation might have been based."

"What makes it still curious is the instructions which the box contained. In this paper which I have in my mind he tells me that in case of its being necessary to hold a coroner's inquest on his body, the package containing his will is not to be opened till the Coroner has given his verdict. Now, there again is something which suggests that he hardly expected to die in the ordinary course of nature."

Adair walked across the room and back again before he answered. His restlessness throughout the interview was marked; he seemed unable to keep still. As he moved to and fro his ill-fitting clothes—too small in all directions for a man of his inches—made of him a figure which was both sinister and grotesque.

"Mr. Foster, I don't see to what your questions are pointing. Jerningham Creed was a money-lender of the most nefarious type. He had dealings in all directions, with sums of all magnitudes. Such a man was sure to have enemies—beyond a doubt he was aware of this. Is it not conceivable that he had reason to believe that he was going in almost daily fear of his life?"

"From whom? Did you ever hear him threatened?"

"Not I; and that's what I'm driving at. Are you hinting, in even the remotest way, that I had anything to do with the death of Mr. Jerningham Creed?"

"I am not! But I can not help thinking that you suspect some one who had. In view of the fact that he has made of you a rich man, I put it to you if you are of opinion that it is—we will say wise—to keep your ideas upon the subject to yourself."

Adair came up to the table when the lawyer ceased speaking; the two men looked each other steadily in the eyes. Then Adair seated himself on the side of the table, and laughed—he alone knew what at—and presently said:

"Foster, you and I are going to be friends. Now that I'm a rich man I can afford a friend like you, and I shall want one. I have all sorts of schemes in my head in which a lawyer who is at the same time honest and smart will be absolutely indispensable, if those schemes are to be carried to a successful conclusion. One of these days I may want to talk to you about all sorts of things. At present I don't. That is the final answer to everything you have in your mind, so change the subject, please. I hear that the old firm is still being carried on by Messrs. Issachar and Daniel."

Getting off the table, Adair smiled at the man on the other side of it; the lawyer smiled back at him.

"So I understand. They did a good deal of Mr. Creed's business, didn't they?"

"They did all the dirtiest part of it. A nice pair they are! I'm told they are proposing, in the absence of any will, to carry on the business in the interests of—I don't quite know whom."

Adair was walking about the room again.

"Foster, I'm going round to Mitre Court. I'm going to pay them a visit and explain how matters stand. Would you mind coming with me? I'm proposing to treat Messrs. Issachar and Daniel to a little surprise."

CHAPTER II

SWEEPING THEM OUT

THE chambers of the late Jerningham Creed were on the second floor of a building which stood badly in need of renovation. They were probably the most ill-kept apartments in that building. In the front room, which Mr. Creed had used as an office, two men were seated at a large, old-fashioned and shabby writing-table. In front of them stood an individual who held a dilapidated top-hat in his hand; somehow his whole appearance was in sympathy with that top-hat. One of the men at the table—small, lean, dark, with eyes and nose which seemed too large for his face—was addressing this individual in anything but friendly tones.

"It's no good, Hackman; pay, or do the other thing. We won't give you another day; not another hour. We're sick of your sort. The money by ten o'clock tomorrow morning, or every stick you've got in your house by twelve. Now off you go; that's enough of you."

The shabby man endeavored to expostulate.

"But, Mr. Issachar, I give you my word that if it hadn't been for a series of the most unexpected misfortunes——"

Mr. Issachar cut him short.

"Yes, I know—whisky and Hollands. Too much drink and too many horses. I won't listen to a word! Are you going?"

"But, Mr. Issachar, if you'll allow me to say just one word——"

Mr. Issachar struck a bell which was beside him. A burly man came out of another room.

"Potter, put this man into the street."

Potter approached the shabby-looking individual, who put his hat on in evident haste.

"I'll go, Mr. Issachar, I'll go——"

"No, you won't, Mr. Hackman; if you please, you'll stay." Martin Adair came into the room. "You shouldn't leave your door open, Issachar. I've been listening on the landing. What are you doing in this room, Mr. Issachar; and you, Mr. Daniel?"

The little Jew stared up at the newcomer.

"What are we doing? Of all the impudence! What are you doing, you—gentleman picked out of the gutter? You get out of this, quick! No nonsense, my man! Your services are no longer required; we prefer your room to your company. Why Mr. Creed ever stood you at all I can't make out. Take yourself off, or Potter shall attend to you."

"If I were you, Potter, I don't think I should try."

Adair had come right into the room, and stood in front of the table at which the two men were seated.

"Mr. Issachar, Mr. Daniel, this room, and all it contains, is mine. You are trespassers. As you were good enough to say to me, your services are not required. If I have to employ solicitors they won't be your kind. You'll be held responsible for everything you've done since the death of Mr. Creed, and matters will at once be carefully gone into to see what you have done. At present, good morning."

Messrs. Issachar and Daniel looked at each other, as if doubting if the newcomer was serious. Presently Mr. Daniel asked:

"What game's this, Adair? What are you trying to play at?"

Mr. Daniel spoke with a strong Cockney accent, and he squinted. Martin Adair looked down at him as at some puny thing.

"The game, Mr. Daniel, is that Mr. Jerningham Creed's will has been found."

Both men started; again they looked at each other.

"What are you giving us, Adair? What will's been found? Don't you try to come it over us—take a tip from me."

"Mr. Creed, gentlemen, made a will which he deposited for safe keeping with Mr. Edward Foster, a legal gentleman of very highest repute, who has chambers in Gray's Inn Buildings. I've just heard that will read. It's very simple—Mr. Creed has left me everything."

"I don't believe it!" Mr. Issachar snapped.

His partner added—

"We neither of us believe it. You tell it for a tale! Why should he leave you so much as a penny piece? I don't believe he did."

"Is that so, Mr. Issachar and Mr. Daniel? Here is Mr. Foster—he may be able to give you a little assistance.

As he spoke the gentleman referred to entered the room.

"Mr. Foster, I don't know if you are acquainted with Mr. Issacher and Mr. Daniel; if you're not I'm sure you don't want to be. I've just been informing them that Mr. Creed's will has been found, and that by it I'm sole residuary legatee—I believe that's the proper legal term. Would you mind informing these persons that that is the case?"

"That certainly is the case Mr. Adair." The newcomer looked at the two men at the table. "Mr. Adair is quite accurate in what he says. Mr. Creed confided his will to my keeping; by it he leaves everything, unconditionally, to Mr. Martin Adair."

The two men broke out into a storm of questions, one tumbling over the other.

"When was this will made? Who drew it up? Why wasn't its existence made known to us before? Under what circumstances was it drawn up? Why should he have left, as you say he has, everything he had to a man whose acquaintance he made in the gutter, and who was only a sort of hanger-on in his office? Are there no legacies, no mention of old friends, of business associates of long standing, who have rendered him inestimable services? Do you wish us to believe that he's left us nothing?"

Mr. Foster replied to all the questions at once.

"Your names are not mentioned."

"I don't believe it!" Mr. Daniel was moved to wrath. "Why, we've done his business for more than twenty years. What has Mr. Martin Adair ever done for him?"

Mr. Adair's reply to this question took the form of an instruction to Potter.

"Potter, put these two men down the stairs and into the street—or, if you don't feel disposed to do so, I will. Issachar, come out of that chair." The speaker, moving round the table, took Mr. Issachar by the collar of his coat. Mr. Issachar showed signs of fight on lines of his own.

"Don't you lay a finger on me, my man, or I'll make you pay for it. Even supposing there is something in this cock-and-bull story of yours, you can't handle me as if I were so much furniture. There's our bill; we've been working here night and day ever since that old man was murdered. Everything would have gone to pot if it hadn't been for us. Who's going to pay us for what we've done?"

"That's a question, Issacher, which will be considered later, and on which I have no doubt a good deal will be heard from you. At the present moment what you have to do is get. Mr. Foster, I call you to witness that I have informed these two gentlemen that they are trespassing on my premises, and that I wish them to cease that trespass. If they refuse I believe I'm at liberty to remove them without using any more violence than is absolutely necessary."

"That is the case, Mr. Adair."

"Then, as that is the case, Mr. Issachar, allow me to lift you tenderly in my arms."

Suiting the action to the word, the big man lifted the little one off his feet. The little man screamed.

"Where's my hat, and my umbrella, and my bag? I'm not going to leave them behind."

"Rest easy, you shall have your belongings to keep you company."

Mr. Issachar having been borne from the room, Adair, returning, beckoned to his partner.

"Now, Mr. Daniel, how is it to be—on your own feet or in my arms?"

Mr. Daniel crammed a felt hat down on to his head; with an umbrella in one hand and a black bag in the other, he began to move toward the door. As he went he gave utterance to his feelings.

"You shall hear of this, Mr. Adair. Don't you think you've got the best of us. I leave this room under protest, in fear of violence. I shouldn't wonder if you found this the most expensive little game you ever played. What do you want with me? Don't you lay your hand upon my shoulder."

Adair had intercepted the speaker on his way to the door.

"What's in that bag, Mr. Daniel? You'll excuse my looking."

"Don't you touch my bag. That's felony if you touch my bag. Mr. Foster, I call on you to witness."

"Call your uncle and aunt to witness, Mr. Daniel. I'm going to see what's in that bag; we'll talk about felony afterwards."

Taking the bag out of the excited gentleman's hand, Adair, opening it, turned its contents out on to the table. A quantity of papers appeared.

"These papers will be examined, Mr. Daniel. Now for Mr. Issachar's bag. This is his, I think, on the floor by the table."

Picking up another black bag, twin brother to the first, he turned out its contents.

"More papers; most of them, I imagine, mine. Those which are not shall be returned to Mr. Issachar. There, gentlemen, are your bags. One remark I have to make: any papers you have in your keeping belonging to the estate of the late Mr. Jerningham Creed will be handed to me, or to my solicitor Mr. Edward Foster here, within four-and-twenty hours, or the consequences will be on your own heads."

WHEN Messrs. Issachar and Daniel had departed, which they did threatening all sorts of dire things, Mr. Adair turned his attention to the burly Potter, who had been witnessing the little scene which had just taken place with what seemed anything but an air of enjoyment.

"So your name's Potter. Where do you come from?"

"Messrs. Issachar and Daniel brought me, sir. I'm employed by them."

"If that is so, return to your own employers; you certainly are not employed by me."

Mr. Potter meekly went. Adair addressed the gentleman with the dilapidated top hat, whose bearing suggested that he was in a state of considerable incertitude.

"Your name, I believe, is Hackman, Ebenezer Hackman. You owed Mr. Creed money which you have repeatedly promised to pay and haven't."

Mr. Hackman turned his hat round and round between his fingers as he delivered himself of a stammering reply.

"Mr. Creed lent me sixty pounds on a bill of sale on my furniture for one hundred and fifty. I wasn't able to pay the principal on the day arranged, so I've had to keep on paying fines. I've paid him in fines altogether just on ninety pounds, and he's still got that bill of sale for a hundred and fifty. There's a fine of five pounds due today, and I do give you my word, sir, that I'll let you have it the day after tomorrow. And if things only begin to look up a little I'll let you have the whole amount perhaps next month. My wife's ill, and if you take the furniture—break up the home—I shouldn't wonder if it would—be the death of her."

"I fancy, Mr. Hackman, I've heard you tell that story before. Your wife seems to be a chronic invalid, and you seem to have got a habit of promising to pay next month. Here's a receipt in full for the money you owed Mr. Creed. I've a notion, Mr. Hackman, that if you drank more water, and did less betting, you might be able to keep out of the hands of money-lenders. Good morning to you, sir. You needn't thank me; you know your way to the door."

Clearly Mr. Hackman did, because he went through it, in a state of obvious mental bewilderment. When he was on the landing he looked at the slip of paper which Mr. Adair had passed him across the table.

> Received from Ebenezer Hackman the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds in full settlement of any claims which the estate of the late Jerningham Creed may have against him. The bill of sale which Ebenezer Hackman gave to the late Jerningham Creed is hereby canceled.
>
> MARTIN ADAIR.

Mr. Hackman read this document half aloud, then gave a little gasp.

"Who's Martin Adair? I suppose he is. Well, if this don't beat—anything! Now I shall be able to borrow a bit more. I'll put every farthing on Dandy Dinmont I can get—that horse ought to be worth a fortune to me."

Unconscious of Mr. Hackman's soliloquy without, Mr. Foster said to Martin Adair within—

"Is that the way in which you propose to carry on the business?"

"Yes, Foster, you've hit it. That is exactly the way."

CHAPTER III

THE MAULER

MR. FOSTER and Martin Adair had a long talk; they went through a great many papers together, then the lawyer departed. Adair, having seen him off the premises, said to himself—

"There's something at the back of Foster's mind."

The consciousness that he was left alone in Jerningham Creed's chambers seemed suddenly to strike him. He looked around the room.

"So this is all mine. How funny! I represent the most blackguardly money-lending business in London—that seems droll. This room wants doing up. It's full of atmosphere; the business which has been done in it has left its impress upon the walls and ceiling. They're filthy. I noticed it the first time Creed brought me in here; somehow now I notice it more than ever. I wonder why."

Going to the table he turned over idly some of the papers which he and the lawyer had been examining.

"The man still lives in these! The whole place seems full of him. I have a queer sort of feeling that at any moment I may hear that croaking voice of his. He seems all the time to be at the back of me; I'm conscious of an inclination to look round and see if he's there. It isn't wholesome. It's also ridiculous—absurd. He's really dead."

Adair, standing up straight, extended his arms as if to stretch himself. The strain upon his garments caused by his attempt to do so turned his thoughts into another channel.

"I believe I've burst the sleeve of this coat, and I'm almost sure that something went behind. Since I'm a rich man the first thing I must do is to buy myself clothes proper to my position, which will fit. I am rich!"

He took from his coat pocket a wad of bank-notes.

"One hundred pounds, twenty-fives; an advance from my solicitor in proof that I am rich. I shall probably have to wait more than six months before I touch any of Jerningham Creed's money. In the meantime my solicitor will see that I am properly clad. That again seems funny. I can't help thinking that old Creed must have been a humorist. What's that?"

Turning suddenly on his heel, he glanced behind him.

"I thought I heard somebody laughing. When a man's in a certain state what tricks his senses can play him!"

He crossed to a door which was in the opposite corner.

"Empty—of course that room's empty. Who imagined that it wasn't empty? This is the apartment in which I used to sit and work myself to the bone to earn thirty shillings a week, which Creed took particular care should never be paid in full."

Martin Adair stood with the open door in his hand, looking from one room to the other with an odd expression on his face.

"I wonder why he took me into his office. I felt at the time that it wasn't only gratitude for the little service I rendered him under the shadow of Waterloo Bridge which induced him to employ me. Then what other inducement could he have had? And why, in the name of all that's wonderful, did he leave me his money?. What was in his mind when he made that will?"

Returning into the larger room he seemed to develop a sudden restlessness.

"The atmosphere of this room worries me; it will get on my nerves if I stop here long. I've a preposterous notion that, if I could only see him, Creed's in it all the time. I must be a bit under the weather; a man who has just heard that a fortune has been left him oughtn't to feel like that."

Again spinning suddenly on his heels, he stared around him.

"Confound it! I could have sworn there was some one there—this is most unpleasant. Let me see; that door leads into Creed's private apartments. I presume it's open—I was never on the other side of it. There can't be any one playing fool tricks on the other side of that door. If there is——!"

He left the sentence unfinished, crossing the room and opening the door to which he had alluded.

"What a musty smell! This place does want doing up. This, I take it, was his private sitting-room."

He was standing in a fair-sized apartment which was rather overcrowded with substantial furniture. A big oak dining-table, a huge side-board, heavy chairs. Everything was in confusion. A dirty tablecloth was at one end of the table, on which were the remnants of a meal. Having opened the windows, Adair took up a dish on which there was something not nice to look at.

"That's the remains of Creed's last supper. Fancy leaving it there all this time. What am I to do with it? I can't put it out of the window."

Something struck his ear; he listened.

"Hullo! That sounds like some one in the next room; some one of real live flesh and blood. Who's there?"

HE RETURNED to the adjoining apartment to see. A woman was standing in the doorway which opened on to the landing.

"You must excuse my coming in, sir, but I knocked and no one answered."

"That's all right; I didn't hear you. Who are you and what do you want?"

"Can I see Mr. Creed?"

"Mr. Creed? I don't think you can."

He eyed her. She was a woman probably in the forties; careworn, anxious; a type he had seen represented again and again in that room. His tone was unintentionally brusque; it seemed to awe her. She was apologetic.

"I'm very sorry to seem troublesome, but I should very much like to see Mr. Creed. I've come all the way from Spalding."

"Have you? Permit me, madam, to offer you a chair. In Spalding they seem to be a little behind the times. News must reach you slowly there. Perhaps you don't read the papers."

"No, sir, I don't. My time's too much occupied to bother about newspapers."

She spoke with a quiet earnestness which lent her an odd sort of dignity. Adair, who was standing close to the seat on which at his invitation she had placed herself, looked down at her with quizzical eyes.

"That explains it. May I ask to whom I am speaking?"

"My name is Bucknell—Mary Bucknell. I live at the Wish Farm, Great Beddows, near Spalding. I wrote to Mr. Creed, but as I had no answer I thought I'd come and see him. I had to come and see him."

"If you'd been a reader of newspapers, Mrs. Bucknell——"

"Miss Bucknell—I'm unmarried. I live with my mother; she's Mrs. Bucknell."

"If you'd been a student of the daily journals, Miss Bucknell, you'd have seen something which was of interest to you. You'd' have seen that Mr. Creed was dead."

"Dead! Mr. Creed dead! How long has he been dead? What will happen to us?"

"That, I fancy, is a question a good many people are asking. The only interest they take in Mr. Creed's death is how it will affect them. You owe him money?"

"A great deal! I wish I didn't. When father died he left debts which had to be paid. We didn't know where to turn for the money. Mother saw an advertisement in the *Family Hearthstone*——"

"Did Mr. Creed advertise in the *Family Hearthstone?* That's just the sort of paper which would commend itself to him as getting at the sort of public he wanted."

"It was just a little advertisement about a private gentleman wishing to lend money to ladies in distress. So I wrote, and he lent us five hundred pounds on the security of the farm."

"Is it your freehold?"

"It's belonged to the Bucknells for generations. We used the money to pay father's debts—we were to pay it back in two years—Mr. Creed said we needn't worry if we couldn't. Things went wrong; mother was ill, and I was worried, and I forgot the day when the first instalment was due. Mr. Creed came down to see us."

"I presume you and he had a nice little interview?"

"Well, sir, he was not unkind. I told him how things were, and that I couldn't pay. He said it didn't matter—I needn't worry; all I need do was to sign a paper which he took out of his pocket, and he'd see that it was all right—so I signed it."

"Having first, I take it, read the paper."

"I didn't read it myself, but Mr. Creed explained. I'm afraid I didn't quite understand his explanation. Things didn't improve, and when another instalment was coming due I wrote and told him so. He came down again—four times he's been down altogether, and each time I've signed a paper."

"Have you, since the money was first lent, paid him nothing?"

"Mr. Creed always said it didn't matter. Then, about a month ago, there came a letter in which he said that if we didn't pay the seventeen hundred and fifty pounds we owed him he'd have to take possession of the farm."

"So the five hundred had become seventeen hundred and fifty pounds!"

"I myself was ill in bed when the letter came. Mother, seeing it was for me, didn't open it, and kept it for me till I was better. That was more than a fortnight after it came. Then I wrote to Mr. Creed, but I've had no answer! So I've been wondering what he means to do. So I had to come and ask him. And now, sir, you say he's dead!"

"Fortunately for you, Miss Bucknell, he died very soon after that letter was dispatched. I'm his heir; he left me everything he had."

"Did he, sir? Are you his son?"

"I'm no relation of his. Why he left me his money I have yet to learn. In the meanwhile let me ask you, Miss Bucknell, not to worry. So soon as I am able I will call on you at the Wish Farm, as Mr. Creed used to do. I have no doubt that we shall be able to arrange matters satisfactorily."

When the anxious lady, having done her best—in spite of his efforts to stop her—to express her gratitude, had departed, Mr. Adair soliloquized:

"Seventeen hundred and fifty pounds for five hundred—in two years! That's the way my money was made. If Jerningham Creed had lived a little longer I might have been the present possessor of the Wish Farm. It seems a pity that he should have died." There was a tapping at the door. "Who's that? Miss Bucknell returned? Come in!"

THE door opened to admit a very different person from Miss Bucknell; a fairly tall, squarely built, powerful looking man, whose appearance could hardly be described as prepossessing. When he saw Mr. Adair he slipped rather than stepped into the room, closed the door, and stood with his back against it. There was something in the way in which he looked at the other which was eminently unfriendly. There was a threat in the tone of his voice.

"So it's you!" he said.

"That is so. And it seems to be you. And who may you be?"

"Don't you know me? You think. You look round inside your head and you'll remember who I am."

"I've seen some scoundrels in my time, and possibly you're one of them—I'm not able to say exactly which."

Adair's coolness seemed to annoy the other.

"That's the way you talk, is it? Seen some scoundrels, have you? So have I. I'm looking at one now!"

As he said this the newcomer looked at Mr. Adair with something in his glance which was unpleasantly significant. He was a low-browed man, with a square face and a still squarer jaw. His nose, with its wide nostrils, was not only flat; something seemed to have happened to it, so that it was a little on one side. He had high cheekbones, curiously small eyes. His mouth was huge.

As he looked at Mr. Adair his lips, parting in an ungenial grin, showed that several of his front teeth were missing. Dark stubble covered the greater part of his skin, giving him an unwashed look. He wore a suit of gray tweed which was by no means new. A red, bird's-eye cotton handkerchief twisted around his throat took the place of a collar. There was something about the whole man which suggested a bull—his small eyes, unintellectual head, short neck, deep chest, broad shoulders.

Mr. Adair was possibly taking in these details as he seemed to be considering what might be the meaning of the almost savage hostility with which the stranger regarded him. The question which he presently put suggested that, so far as he was concerned, the problem remained unsolved.

"You appear to be a pleasant sort of man. I really do not remember having met you before. You know who I am?"

The other's manner as he replied was almost ferocious.

"Do I know who you are! Come off of it! Where do you think I was that Tuesday night?"

Mr. Adair smiled, as if he were inclined to think the man an amusing study.

"You pique my curiosity. To what Tuesday night do you refer?"

"The Wednesday morning—it was the Wednesday morning when the old man who lived here was found dead, wasn't it? And the night before was Tuesday. Very well; that's the Tuesday night I mean. Now you've got it."

"I do seem to have got something, but I'm afraid I don't quite know what."

The stranger's reply was curious, clearly conveying a meaning which was not on the surface.

"I've got the rope around your neck; that's what I've got!"

"Have you? This is interesting. And what is the object of your visit here?"

"I didn't look to find you here, and so I tell you. You've got a nerve to show yourself inside this room. You must have some pretty deep game on, you must. It must be something very funny to bring you here. But since you are here I may as well have a bob or two."

"From whom?" Mr. Adair's smile was bland.

"Who from? Why, from you. How much money have you got on you?"

"I have quite a quantity.

"Then you've been lifting it. That's what your game is; you've had the nerve to come here and run the rule over that old man's things. All right; so be it. I'm willing, only—we'll go halves, you and I, if you don't mind. To begin with, you turn your pockets out and let's see what's in them."

"That by way of a beginning? You have your own ideas. And after?"

"I'll show you what's after. You turn out your pockets. Or shall I save you the trouble and do it for you?"

The stranger moved toward Mr. Adair with an air of truculence which some persons might have found uncomfortably suggestive. If it had any distressing effect on the gentleman approached he managed to conceal the fact. His smile was, if anything, blander than before.

"What's your fighting weight?"

Not only the question, but the air of geniality with which it was asked, seemed to take the other by surprise. The tone in which he answered was one of concentrated scorn.

"My fighting weight? What are you playing at? Never you mind what my weight is. I suppose you're seven inches taller than me, my lad, but I could kill you inside three minutes. So none of your airs with me; you turn your pockets out on that table."

"I think," replied Mr. Adair mildly, "that I should like you to kill me first. The exercise might do me good."

"Exercise!" Some ill-sounding words came from the stranger's ugly mouth. "I'll give you exercise. I'm no man what you can do with as you please—don't you make any mistake about that. I'll darned soon show you!"

He clenched his fists.

IN RATHER less than a quarter of an hour afterward Mr. Adair strolled down the stone staircase into the court without. In the doorway he was stopped by an undersized individual of dubious appearance.

"Where's my mate?" he inquired.

"Your mate?" Adair regarded him genially. "I wonder if that's the gentleman I left upstairs."

"What's he doing upstairs?"

"That's what I rather want to know. Perhaps you wouldn't mind stepping upstairs to give me the benefit of your opinion. This way."

Mr. Adair went first; the other followed. He seemed to be in a state of some mental uncertainty as he ascended; a remark he made showed it.

"This ain't nothing you're playing off on me, governor? It ain't safe to play with me."

"I shouldn't think it was." They had reached the landing outside Mr. Creed's chambers. "This is where I left your mate. Step inside. Don't be afraid—my intentions are perfectly honest."

The undersized person evinced a decided reluctance to accept Mr. Adair's invitation.

"I don't doubt what you say, but if it's all the same to you perhaps you wouldn't mind going in first."

"Don't be an idiot! After you."

Before he appeared to know it the stranger found himself inside the room. He was obviously startled.

"Here!" he exclaimed, a little late in the day. "Don't you lay your hands on me!"

"Is that your mate?" Mr Adair pointed to a figure which lay prone on the floor. The other stared at this figure amazed.

"Why, what's happened? What's come to him?"

"He and I have been having a little argument. He started out to kill me and—now I'm wondering if I've killed him."

The stranger regarded Adair as if he had said something incredible.

"You've had an argument with him? What—with the Mauler? Do you mean you've been having a go at him with the knuckles? And you've outed him? Why there ain't half a dozen men in London who could live with him through a couple of rounds, especially with the bare ones."

"He had some pretty ideas on the subject of how to use them, as I found. I caught him on the point of the chin and down he went—and there he stopped. The question is, hadn't you better fetch a doctor? He mayn't be dead."

"Dead! What, the Mauler dead? Go on!" The speaker, kneeling, addressed himself to the recumbent figure. "Mauler! Here, Sam! Don't say he's done you in! What, a bloke like him? Don't say it, Sam."

For some seconds Sam said nothing. The man kneeling at his side, taking him by the right shoulder, began to shake him. As if the movement had roused him from sleep, all at once Sam's body twitched. He seemed to be making an effort to stretch himself. He muttered in guttural tones—

"Here, what's the game?"

Mr. Adair, looking down at him, smiled.

"It appears," he observed, "that Sam isn't dead."

CHAPTER IV

IN SEARCH OF ROOMS

MARTIN ADAIR resided in what was called a bed-sitting-room, in a street leading off Drury Lane. Having clothed himself in garments better suited to his new station, and well-fitting, Mr. Adair proceeded to provide himself with more appropriate quarters. He had a conference on the subject with Mr. Foster.

"I don't quite know what to do," he told that gentleman. "I don't want to go to a hotel, for various reasons; I don't see myself in a house all alone; I think it will have to be rooms—nice rooms, in some pleasant residential quarter."

"What are you going to do about the business? Even if you propose to attend every day, you ought to have some one in charge who is capable of representing you."

This conversation took place in Mr. Foster's chambers. There was a piece of white cardboard on the table which Mr. Adair annexed. He made free with the lawyer's pens and ink. Presently he held up the piece of cardboard with this legend inscribed on it in large characters:

Out for the day. Business suspended. Call again.

"I'm going to sport the oak in old Creed's chambers, and I'm going to hang that up outside. Letters may be passed through the opening intended for them; callers can't. When I choose to go there I shall, when I don't I shan't. The business be hanged!"

The lawyer regarded him with inquisitive eyes.

"What's the idea? The business is a valuable asset. Why should you throw away all that money when by paying a man, say, a hundred and fifty a year you need do nothing of the kind?"

"Foster, I'm very much obliged to you for your very kind advice. Once more, to avoid any possibility of future misunderstanding—do I gather that Mr. Jerningham Creed left me everything he had to do with as I please?"

"Precisely."

"Then that's how it is." Mr. Adair, rising from his seat, held the piece of cardboard out in front of him.

"I'll fasten this to the oak with my own hands, to make sure that it's there; then I'll seek fresh quarters."

SOME days passed. One afternoon, still in quest of the sort of habitation he required, Mr. Adair found himself in Putney, in a lane opening on to Barnes Common. Some of the houses were big ones—what mght fairly be called mansions.

Presently he came to one which was little more than a cottage. The walls were covered with ivy; the roof was tiled; there was a little garden, an old-fashioned hedge in front; and in one of the windows was a card—

APARTMENTS

This card caught Mr. Adair's eye. He paused to study it. Then he opened the gate, went to the front door, and rang the bell. Some time passed and no one answered.

"It looks as if no one were at home," was his comment. "I'll ring again."

He did; still no sign that any heard.

"It will be a nuisance if every one is out. I'll try again."

He rang a third time. After another interval his attentive ear caught what seemed to him to be sounds within.

"There's some one moving; some one is at home. Is it a case of being stone deaf?"

He sounded another peal; clearly this time he had been heard. Some one was unlocking and opening the door from within.

"Considering that they've got 'Apartments' in the window they seem to take precious good care to guard themselves against intrusion. Probably some ancient creature is the sole inhabitant. As from the outside the house promises just the sort of thing I want, that will be a pity. I wonder who is going to open the door."

When the door was opened, and a girl stood looking out at him, apparently his wonder grew. As the door was opened wider—which it was by inches, as if the person who held the handle was reluctant to open it at all—and he began to perceive more clearly who was on the other side, judging from his demeanor, instead of a creature of flesh and blood, he might have been confronted by some terrifying phantom. And yet the person who stood inside the partially opened door was nothing but a girl.

And a very prepossessing specimen of her kind, with nice hair, nice eyes, and what was of almost more importance, a nice mouth—with, as her half opened lips revealed, nice, small, white teeth beyond. There was certainly nothing in her appearance calculated to alarm the average man; yet that she had a very remarkable and unusual effect upon the man of six feet two was clear. The odd part of it was that she seemed almost as much perturbed as he.

They stared at each other for some

moments without either speaking. Then in distinctly tremulous tones she asked:

"What—what do you want? What name, please?"

Obviously he had to make an effort before he was able to answer her at all. When, as it were, he had pulled himself together, he still seemed to be at a loss—as if he had not quite followed her meaning. He stammered almost more than she had done.

"I've—I've come to see the apartments."

"Apartments!"

She started, as if the word were one which she had never heard before. She gave a sort of little gasp.

"Oh!" Then, after a moment's hesitation, she added: "I'm—I'm afraid we haven't any to let."

"But there's a card in the window. It says 'Apartments' on the card."

"Does it? I—I'd forgotten there was a card in the window."

"Are the rooms already let?"

"No, they're not let—only——"

She stopped, as if unable or unwilling to finish her sentence.

"Only what?"

He seemed to be regaining the presence of mind which in such odd fashion he had so suddenly lost. As she seemed to be seeking in vain for words with which to reply, he went on—

"If the rooms are not let, if you don't mind I should like to see them."

As he made a forward movement she fell back. He entered the house. She still was silent.

"Which are the rooms?"

"These—these are the rooms."

She opened a door on her left, which he passed through. He looked about him.

"I suppose this is the sitting-room?"

"Yes, that's the sitting-room. The bedroom is above; but—I don't think we ought to let the rooms."

"May I ask why—if they are unoccupied? Do you mean that they're promised?"

"No, they're not promised. I should like very much to let them; only I don't think I ought."

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow you." He had recovered himself sufficiently to smile at her. "May I ask what is the rent you want?"

"We thought of asking three guineas a week. You see, they're good rooms and well furnished; and there's a bathroom, and no extras."

"Three guineas a week will suit me very well. They are, I think, just the sort of rooms I want. By what name ought I to address you?"

"My name?" Again an odd look came into her eyes. She seemed to shiver. "My name is—is Dennis, Winifred Dennis."

"And mine, Miss Dennis, is Adair—Martin Adair. When would it be convenient to you for me to enter into occupation?"

"Occupation? Do you mean, when could you come?"

"As regards a reference I shall be happy to refer you to my solicitor, Mr. Edward Foster, of Gray's Inn Buildings. But after all, the best form of guarantee of a lodger's stability is his willingness to pay cash.

"You say three guineas a week. I shall be happy, Miss Dennis, if you will allow me, to pay a month's rent in advance. Perhaps you will permit me to enter into my tenancy tomorrow. If that is satisfactory to you, here are twelve guineas."

"Twelve guineas!" The girl's breath seemed to come more quickly as she repeated the words. She watched him taking out the money with wide-open eyes. "If you were to give me twelve guineas——"

Pausing, she seemed to change the shape of her sentence.

"If you give me twelve guineas you can have the rooms," she said.

The matter was settled, in a fashion which on both sides was informal and unbusiness-like, and he departed with the understanding that on the morrow he should return to the Dovecote—which was the name painted on the garden-gate—with his luggage, and enter into possession of his rooms. He said nothing about the time of day he proposed for his return, nor whether he would be there for lunch, or for dinner; he said nothing about meals or food; and the girl did not inquire. The consciousness of these omissions began to force itself upon him as he walked back to Putney station.

"I seem to have made a pretty mess of the business; upon my word I do. Considering her unwillingness to let the rooms I couldn't have been more confiding. When I get back tomorrow I may find her gone, with my twelve guineas; I have nothing whatever to show that she ever had them. She mayn't be the person entitled to receive payment; I may find a Gorgon of a landlady awaiting me, who'll present me with the ordinary bill at the end of the week."

He struck the ground with his stick and laughed aloud. Passers-by turned to look at the tall man, wondering what amused him. His mood changed; he frowned.

"When I first saw her standing in the doorway," he said to himself, "you might have knocked me down with a feather. It was she; I'll swear it was she. I'm not likely to be mistaken about a thing like that. I wish I could forget. In the name of all that's wonderful, what does it mean?"

As he returned in the train to Waterloo, perhaps not unnaturally his thoughts were still concerned with his new quarters.

"Of all the amazing things that ever happened—that I should have come upon her like that! She didn't know me. It wasn't the sight of my face which startled her; it was something else—I wonder what. Is she the mistress of the house? What an idiot I was not to ask! She can't be alone in the house — that's impossible; yet I didn't hear a sound.

"All the while I was talking to her she was afraid—not of me, but of something else. Can it have been—?

"No, it couldn't! I dare say I shall find that there's a very simple explanation of the lady's agitation; perhaps after I've been there a week or two we shall laugh together at the recollection. It's impossible that I could be mistaken; it was she. She has been present to my mind's eye sleeping and waking, for—how many weeks?

"And that I should have seen her, a creature of real flesh and blood, standing inside that door!" He drew a long breath. "I have pretty strong nerves, but it wasn't strange that for some seconds they were all just anyhow. What on earth does the thing mean?"

CHAPTER V

SUDDEN NOTICE

MARTIN ADAIR entered into occupation of his rooms at the Dovecote on Wednesday, May thirteenth. It was beautiful weather. He thought, as the cab drew up at the gate, what a charming place it seemed.

There was no delay this time in answering his ring; the door was opened almost as soon as he touched the bell. Miss Dennis appeared upon the other side. On that occasion there was none of that confusion which had marked the deportment of both parties on the previous day. Miss Dennis positively smiled at him.

"I forgot to ask you yesterday what time you would be here. It was too stupid of me, because this morning I had to go out. You would have had to go without lunch if you had come."

"I also was conscious of my shortcomings in not being more explicit. I thought if I came about tea-time I should be pretty safe." The girl, leading the way up the staircase, conducted him to a really charming apartment on the first floor. "Is this my bedroom? This is splendid. By the way, Miss Dennis, you spoke about going out this morning, as if there would be no one to let me in if I arrived during your absence. You don't mean to say that you're alone in the house?"

There was a momentary silence before she answered.

"My mother and I are alone in the house; mother is a great invalid. I ought to have told you yesterday that we keep no servant; we—we can't afford one. But I don't think you'll find I'm a bad cook." A wistful look came into her eyes. "If you'll have a little patience with me and give me a fair trial, I'll—I'll do my very best to give you satisfaction, Mr. Adair."

He had no answer ready; the girl's manner clogged his tongue. He apostrophized her when she had gone.

"It gives a man the fidgets when she expresses a hope that she'll give him satisfaction as a cook. She's gently bred, and looks to me as if she had never done a stroke of work in her life—and she's to fill the place of a general servant to me.

"That won't do at all. I'm not going to have her sweeping out my sitting-room and tidying up after me. Before I've been here a week I'll engage a servant."

But the matter proved not to be so simple as he supposed. His calculations were upset by the fact that Miss Dennis turned out to be a much more experienced housewife than he had imagined. She got through the work in a manner which puzzled him.

By the time he got down in the morning everything was spick and span; breakfast was on the table as soon as he appeared;

all his meals were punctual and well cooked. The girl brought the things in and out of the room, and that was practically all he saw of her.

She did the ordering of the provisions—she preferred to do so. It struck him that her intention was to give him as few opportunities of talking to her as she could.

Of her mother he saw and heard nothing. He inquired after her once or twice, but the girl's answers were of a kind which did not invite a further show of interest.

Quite conscious that it was no concern of his and that Miss Dennis was justified in keeping her own counsel, being just then a tolerably idle man he was perhaps the more disposed to engage himself in matters which were no actual affair of his. The part of the house in which Mrs. Dennis might be became quite a problem to him. One morning, as Miss Dennis was removing his breakfast things, he asked her a question point-blank.

"By the way, whereabouts in the house is your mother, Miss Dennis—upstairs or down?"

The girl was collecting the breakfast things upon a tray. She had a plate in one hand and a dish in the other. For just one instant she stopped; her hands shook; then, bringing the plate and the dish together with a clash, she continued her work more hurriedly. Then, picking up the tray, going with it towards the door—how often had he found it difficult to avoid asking her to let him carry that heavy tray —she paused to remark—

"Will you be in at the usual hour for lunch, Mr. Adair?"

He eyed her. She met his glance quite steadily, seeming to ignore the smile by which it was accompanied.

"I think I will take lunch in town."

So soon as he had said it she went out of the room. He stared at the door which she had closed behind her.

"Now what's the meaning of that? She heard my question—why couldn't she answer? Is her mother's whereabouts in the house a mystery? It's a very funny thing."

His tone almost suggested irritation. He unfolded his paper, looked at it, then lowered it and stared again at the door.

"That girl's beginning to possess me; I don't know why, but she is. I'm getting a trick of thinking of nothing else but her. It's—it's absurd!"

He returned to the newspaper, ran his glance hurriedly over it, then lowered it again.

"All I can say is, if her mother is an invalid, she was pretty active last night. Nor is that the first time I have observed her nocturnal activity. It must have been midnight before I was into bed; then everything was still enough.

"Then something woke me. I heard movements downstairs—sounds of voices. I was just thinking of getting up to offer my services in case anything was wrong when the sounds ceased. I looked at my watch; it was nearly twenty minutes past two.

"Just as I was dozing off again I heard what I am convinced was the click of the hasp of the front gate. Miss Dennis had had a visitor—at that hour of the morning! I went to the window to see who it was. It was pitch dark; there was nothing to be seen. It might have been a burglar.

"I went out on to the landing with some idea of going around the house, but as everything was perfectly still I thought better of it and went back to bed. Considering how she takes care that I should confine myself to my own apartments, I could picture the look with which she would regard me if she caught me prowling about in my dressing-gown and pajamas."

Once more he went back to his paper, grumbling to himself as he read it.

"It might have been getting on for three; but if she was up—and I could have declared I heard her voice—she shows no signs of having had a broken night. The next time I hear the garden-gate opened at that hour of the morning I'll find out who has opened it."

THAT week-end Mr. Adair ran over to Paris. He had an uncomfortable and, as he told himself, ridiculous feeling that something was going on at the Dovecote which, just then, made his presence unwelcome.

He left on the Friday and returned on the following Wednesday. He made the acquaintance of a man in the Paris hotel, with whom he returned to London. The boat had a very rough passage; the passengers did not get to London till late.

Adair wired to the Dovecote telling them not to sit up for him; that he would let himself in when he returned. He had a very late dinner with his acquaintance; then spent an hour or two with him in his rooms in Devonshire Place, returning to Putney in a taxicab which he dismissed at the end of the lane.

It was a fine night, or rather morning; all the world seemed asleep. He walked up the hill toward the Dovecote, and had nearly reached it when he became aware that at least in that house some one was still awake.

Voices reached his ear—not soft ones. Some one seemed to be shouting. He stood still. It sounded as if in the Dovecote something unusual was happening. Several people seemed to be speaking together, all of them in angry tones. All at once a sound rose above the others—a sound which was very like a woman's scream, as if she were shrieking either in fear or pain. An exclamation broke from Mr. Adair.

"That's Winifred Dennis! Something's up!"

He hurried toward the house. As he reached it, some one from the back of the house came hurrying along the garden path. He stepped back into the shadow of the house.

"It's Miss Dennis!" he told himself. "Where can she be going at this hour? Can anything have happened to her mother?"

As the garden-gate opened he moved forward, his hat in his hand.

"Miss Dennis," he asked, "is there anything I can do for you? I hope there's nothing wrong."

Coming on her so unexpectedly, since she could hardly have been aware of his nearness, it was not strange that his voice and appearance should have startled her. She shrank back so suddenly that her foot seemed to catch in her skirt. She stumbled; fearing she might fall he put his hand upon her shoulder.

Clearly his assistance was not required. She drew herself suddenly straight, and stepping a little back struck him, first with her left and then with her right fist, full in the face, rushed through the gate and went scurrying down the lane like a hare.

He was amazed. The blows had been hard ones. One of them had reached his mouth; he was not sure that it had not cut his lip. The other had struck him with surprising force upon the cheek-bone. He felt more than a trifle stunned.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he exclaimed. "If that isn't the top brick off the chimney. That wasn't Miss Dennis; it was a man, in a woman's things—which explains why he caught himself in his skirt and nearly tripped himself up.

"He was handier with his fists—those were two nice ones which he got home. What a fool he must have thought me to give him such an opening! I should like to have a chance of returning them. My word! If he hadn't for the moment nearly knocked the sense right out of me I might have had one, too.

"What in thunder was he doing in the Dovecote, in woman's clothes? He certainly was no burglar; some one let him out of the back door. It appears that, after all, I've come back before my presence is desired. I wonder if this time any explanation will be offered."

None was. As he walked up the garden path, along which that petticoated figure had so recently rushed with such dire results to Martin Adair, all was still again. So far as he could perceive, the entire house was in darkness.

He walked around to the back of the house to see if there were any lights there. There appeared to be none. He tried the handle of the back entrance. It seemed to be both locked and bolted.

He let himself in with his latch key at the front door. He could not tell whether any one heard; there was no challenging voice. There was food on a tray in his sitting-room, which he left untouched—everything, apparently, was prepared for his return.

IN THE morning, descending at the usual hour, Miss Dennis brought him his breakfast. He glanced at her.

"I hope I didn't disturb you by my late return."

"I heard you come in," she said.

He noticed how pale she was, and that she seemed flurried. Before he could decide what else to say to her, besides the exchange of the most ordinary greetings, she was gone. As usual, he made certain comments to himself.

"There is something wrong! This time I'm going to know what it is. She looks as if she were worried half out of her life; she seems to have aged since I went away—in less than a week. This time I am going to find out what's the matter; let her resent my questions as she likes. I'll wait till she comes back again."

When she did come back again it was not necessary for him to ask questions; she began on her own account.

Coming forward she leaned upon the edge of the table, as if she found its support desirable. There was an expression on her face and in her eyes which moved him more than he could have thought was possible. Her voice, usually so round and true, was tremulous and broken.

"I—I—I'm sorry to have to tell you, Mr. Adair, that—that—you must go."

"Go!" He stared at her in astonishment; that was not at all what he had expected to hear. "You are not well, Miss Dennis. Let me beg you to sit down. I'll get you a chair."

"No, I won't sit down! I—I'm quite well, thank you." She seemed to make an effort at self-control; words came more freely. "You remember that I told you when you first came to see the rooms that —I didn't think I ought to let them."

"But why must I go? Won't you explain, Miss Dennis? Have I done anything to annoy you? Have you found me a troublesome tenant?"

"No, I haven't; but—I can't explain. I can only tell you—you must go. At once."

"At once? What do you mean by at once?"

"Before—before—half-past ten."

"Before half-past ten? Why, it's nearly ten o'clock now! You're not serious, Miss Dennis? You're not proposing to turn me out of the house at less than half an hour's notice? There must be some very extraordinary reason which is inducing you to act in such a way.

"Suppose I decline to go? I should be quite within my rights. I don't wish to say anything unpleasant, but when you talk about my being out of the house by half past ten, in less than half an hour, I'm compelled to remind you that you're in my debt; I'm not in yours. The period for which I made you an advance payment has still two or three days to run."

"Yes, I—I know; that makes it so—dreadful. And I can't—give you your money back again; I haven't got it."

The girl's state of distress was hurting him each moment more and more. He became desperate.

"Excuse me, Miss Dennis, but matters have reached a point when I must ask you to forgive me if I seem to thrust myself into your private affairs. You said nothing about my going before I left last Friday."

"I—I hoped then it wouldn't be necessary."

"And what, in so short a space of time, has made it necessary? Are you in want of money? You must forgive my speaking bluntly, but if that is the case I am prepared to make you an advance payment on account of these rooms to practically any extent you please. But I decline to be turned out of them—that's final!"

THE girl seemed to try her best to regard him steadily, and to keep herself straight up, but her eyes were all at once blinded by tears. She sank down on to the chair which she had hitherto refused, dropped her head on the white tablecloth, and began to cry in a fashion which terrified Mr. Adair. He stared at her dumfounded.

"Good gracious!" he stammered. "Miss Dennis, don't do that sort of thing. I didn't mean to be a brute. I'll get out of the house inside of five minutes if you like. I only wish you to understand that if you want a friend—or—or help, or anything of that kind, you might count on me; that's all. But if you're so anxious that I should leave your house——"

"I'm not anxious. I don't want you to go."

The wail came from the head on the tablecloth. As he listened Mr. Adair's confusion seemed to increase.

"But if you're not anxious that I should go, if you don't want me to go——"

"It's not a question of what I want. Can't you understand? You'll have to go. You can't stay here. You can't."

"I'm sorry, Miss Dennis, but I can not, and do not, understand. If—as you put it—you don't want me to go, why can't I stay?"

"Because——"

She raised her face from the tablecloth, with the tears streaming down her cheeks, and did her best to meet his eyes.

"Because—there'll be not a stick of furniture left in the house. You can't sleep on nothing, and have your meals on the floor."

CHAPTER VI

THE LADY AND THE LODGER

MARTIN ADAIR, in front of the fireplace, his mouth a little open, his eyes extended to their fullest capacity, stood gazing at the girl as if surprise had deprived him the use of his tongue. Several seconds slipped away before he recovered it.

"But—I understand you less than ever, Miss Dennis. May I ask you to explain what you mean?"

"I mean exactly what I say. Now you've forced me to, I'll tell you everything. I didn't mean to inflict my private troubles on you, but since you seem to be incapable of taking a hint, you leave me with no alternative."

The lady had risen from her chair. Her eyes were still a little dim, but her cheeks flamed. She seemed suddenly in a tempestuous state of mind. Her quick passage from one mood to another disconcerted the man in front of her.

"I assure you, Miss Dennis, I have not the slightest wish to thrust myself into your private affairs——"

She cut him short.

"You say that now—when you insisted on my explaining why you had to go. I tell you quite clearly—since you insist—that you'll have to go before half past ten, because after that time there won't be an article of furniture left in the house."

"But why? Is an earthquake going to swallow them up?"

"Mr. Jerningham Creed's solicitors are going to take them all away. They're going to strip the house."

"Who? What? What's that you say?"

"Oh, I'll tell you everything. It doesn't matter now; everybody will know in a few minutes. I—that's to say we—I mean I—borrowed some money from a money-lender named Creed, Jerningham Creed. I have not been able to pay off the instalments as they fell due. This morning I have had this letter from his solicitors, Messrs. Issachar and Daniel. Now you have the whole sordid truth."

She produced an envelope from some hiding-place in her blouse and flourished it in front of her.

"Is—is that a letter from Messrs. Issachar and Daniel?"

"It is; you can read it if you like." She handed it to him across the table.

"Thank you; I should like."

He read it with the closest attention.

"I see that Messrs. Issachar and Daniel give you notice that unless the three hundred and fifty pounds due from you to the late Mr. Jerningham Creed, together with seventy-five pounds for interest in fines, and five pounds their costs, making altogether four hundred and thirty pounds, are not paid tomorrow—that is this Thursday morning—before half-past ten, the contents of your house will be taken away." Mr. Adair looked across at the girl. "That's a nice letter—a very nice letter, upon my word!"

"You think so, do you? Then I don't. I think it's a horrible, cruel letter. You see, they say I owe them three hundred and fifty pounds. I never had more than two hundred, and I'm sure I've paid Mr. Creed more than that. I never could understand how he made out that the more I paid him the more I owed. Then there's seventy pounds for interest in fines, and five pounds for costs—how do they make out that I owe them that money? I gave them the twelve guineas you gave me for the rooms——"

"Oh, you did, did you?" This was an interpolation from the gentleman.

"Yes, I did—and they wouldn't give me a receipt for it. That was the same with Mr. Creed. Unless I paid him the whole instalment which he said was due he wouldn't give me a receipt. And as I had to pay in driblets, which he would not allow to decrease the debt, the more I paid the more I seemed to owe.

"And now they're going to take away the furniture because I haven't a penny-piece in the world, and you will have to go. I don't suppose you'll like to stay here when there isn't so much as a chair to sit upon."

"No, Miss Dennis, I certainly should not. I like to have at least one chair to sit upon."

"There you are—I knew you were that kind of man. So now you understand why you'll have to go."

"No, Miss Dennis, that is exactly what I don't understand. Indeed, I don't understand this business; but I intend to understand it thoroughly before very long."

"I'm sure I've done my best to make it plain to you."

"You have; I admit it willingly. I'm very much obliged to you for the pains you've taken. Now will you permit me to say just one thing? And that is—that I don't intend to go."

"What? After what I've just been explaining to you, and your saying that you must have a chair to sit upon!"

"I'm going to have several chairs to sit upon. I'm going to have all these chairs—so are you."

"Don't be ridiculous! You can't keep those men from taking them away. They're all of them in the bill of sale. I remember the wording quite well—it said the entire contents of the house."

"Possibly. All the same, I'm going to prevent any one from taking so much as an egg-cup from this house. In other words, I'm going to settle with Messrs. Issachar and Daniel."

"You're going to settle? You! Do you think I'd let you?"

"You can't stop me, Miss Dennis."

"Why are you putting that letter in your pocket?"

"Because I'm going to pay a visit to Messrs. Issachar and Daniel, and propose to favor them with the sight of it."

"With the sight of their own letter! What do you mean? I'm very much obliged to you, Mr. Adair—I don't understand the position you're taking up—but I can assure you that I've not the slightest intention of allowing you to interfere between Messrs. Issachar and Daniel and me. The money was borrowed from Mr. Creed, and it's going to be repaid. If I can't pay it in any other way I'm going to let them have my furniture."

"Exactly, Miss Dennis. Your sentiments do you the greatest possible credit. I'm going out, but I shall be back for dinner."

"You'll be back for dinner! Don't I tell you——"

"I tell you, Miss Dennis, that I shall be back for dinner. You'll be so good as to let me have something nice. I have been in Paris and have missed your cookery."

"Do you think I'm going to let you see those men? Do you really think so?"

"I do, because you can't stop me. I've the right to call upon a firm of lawyers if I choose. I knew Messrs. Issachar and Daniel very well; a finer pair of scoundrels don't exist in London. You needn't distress yourself in the slightest degree about the safety of your furniture. It's yours, and will continue yours. You owe nothing to these—blackguards, as in the course of the day shall be made clear to you. If you'll kindly stand away from that door, Miss Dennis, I shall be able to pass."

She had placed herself in such a position that it almost seemed her intention was to prevent him leaving the room; when he went close to her something which she saw in his face caused her to move aside. As he was opening the door, she exclaimed—

"What's the matter with your lip?"

He looked at her and he smiled.

"I fancy I must have cut myself," he said.

CHAPTER VII

AN EXPLANATION

MESSRS. Issachar and Daniel's offices were in Bouverie Street, on the top floor of an ancient building. Mr. Adair, entering unannounced a room in which both partners happened at that moment to be, greeted them with a reference to the height of their offices above the ground.

"I say, you two! If I were you, you know, I should feel rather shy of being up here, all this way above the earth. Think what it might mean if some one were to throw you out of the window. Some one is sure to do it one day, and how far you'd have to fall!"

Both partners glanced around at him in a manner which suggested that his appearance was more than unexpected—that it was unwelcome. A clerk was peeping through the doorway by which Mr. Adair had just come; he was apparently perturbed, as if his conscience smote him.

"If you please, Mr. Issachar, I told this gentleman you were engaged—but he nearly pitched me into the fireplace when I tried to stop him coming in."

Mr. Adair smiled at the clerk.

"Come, come," he said, "you are putting it rather strongly. And anyhow, it would not have hurt the fireplace."

Mr. Issachar, who had been seated, stood up and glared at the visitor with what he perhaps meant to be a bellicose air.

"You've no right to force yourself into our office when the clerk tells you we're engaged. And I'll tell you this, Mr. Adair, we don't want to see you anyhow, and we won't. Now it is you who are trespassing; so perhaps you'll take yourself off, without a word. We don't want any scene, and we have nothing to say to you."

"I think it is possible that you have nothing which you wish to say to me, Mr. Issachar; but there is something which I must say to you, so I am going to say it. Now, my child!"

The last words were addressed to the juvenile clerk who still peered into the chamber. Without any warning of his intention Mr. Adair thrust him back, drew the door to, locked it, and pocketed the key. Both partners showed signs of being excited.

"None of that, Adair!" cried Mr. Daniel. "None of that. Don't you think we'll stand that sort of thing—because we won't. You put back the key into the lock and open the door."

"If you don't," chimed in his partner, "I shall ring the bell, and I shall have the police sent for. You'd cut a pretty figure in the dock at Bow Street."

"I'm thinking that you'd look rather well in that position, Issachar; and it's one which I shouldn't wonder if you very shortly filled. Don't you worry yourselves, my good sirs. You can ring the bell—you can ring half a dozen bells; you can make any sort of noise you like.

"I'm not going to leave this room, nor am I going to allow our interview to be interrupted, until I have said all that I have to say to you. Don't make a fuss. You'll do no good. You're a pretty pair of rascals!"

With an air of the utmost affability the visitor took a seat which he drew close to the table. He had not removed his hat, and he carried in his hand a cane with which, leaning over, he tapped Mr. Issachar playfully on the arm. Mr. Issachar objected.

"Don't you touch me with your stick!" he cried. "That's assault and battery; I warn you that you'll be made to pay for it. We're not going to stand any more of your nonsense, are we, Daniel?"

He appealed to his partner in the apparent hope that his corroboration would have on him that bracing effect of which he clearly stood in need. Mr. Daniel sustained him with all the emphasis at his command.

"We are not! Don't let him make any error. You be careful, Adair—by gosh, you'd better! I ask you once more, before Mr. Issachar rings the bell—are you going to leave this room or are we to send for the police?"

Ignoring the inquiry, Mr. Adair held out a sheet of paper.

"Which of you—animals wrote this? Or was it written by some starveling clerk in accordance with your instructions? It's a letter received this morning by Miss Dennis, of the Dovecote, Putney. It purports to have come from this office. Did it?"

Both gentlemen seemed reluctant to speak. They glanced at each other as if unpleasantly surprised. Presently Mr. Daniel made a suggestion.

"Let me see what the letter is. How can I tell what it is without looking? It may be anything. Let me look at it."

"You can look at it from where you are—I've told you what it is, and you know. Now what am I to do with you two beauties? Issachar, hadn't you better ring for the police? You have been trying to get money by means of threats and false pretenses out of an unprotected woman—you've had some out of her already.

"Where's this bill of sale of which you speak in this letter? Do you hear, Issachar?"

He raised his voice so suddenly that the gentleman addressed gave a little jump.

"Will you answer me or must I throw you from the window?"

A gray tint seemed to be showing through the bristles about Mr. Issachar's unshaven jaw and chin. His hands were tremulous.

"It's like this, Mr. Adair. I'll tell you how it was, and Daniel here will bear me out. We were instructed by Mr. Creed some time before he—was murdered to act for him in that matter; and—well—in a way we continue to act for him."

"So it seems—in a way. And how about me? Where do I come in? Were you, in a way, acting for me?"

"Not—not exactly, Mr. Adair." All at once Mr. Issachar became confidential. His demeanor suggested that he was trying to get his courage up. "It's like this. I'll just tell you how it was. You see, the accounts got a little confused. Mr. Creed owed us money and we took over certain little matters, as it were, to balance what he owed us. That's how it was, isn't it, Mr. Daniel?"

"That's how it was, Mr. Issachar. Yes, Mr. Adair, that's exactly as it was—as Issachar says."

Mr. Daniel seemed to do his best to look as if he believed his own words and his partner's. The effort was rather a failure. Mr. Issachar went gaily on.

"And one of the matters we took over was the bill of sale on the Dovecote. And of course, as we've been out of our money a good time and the whole thing is a lot overdue, we—we had to do something. Hadn't we, Daniel?"

Mr. Daniel put his finger up to his neck and pulled up his collar.

"Of course we had; certainly we had. Mr. Adair will see we had—he's a reasonable man. We are not rolling in riches, as he is —now; of course we had to do something, so—so we did it. What objection have you to make, Mr. Adair?"

By this time Mr. Daniel had recovered a certain amount of his assurance; he had even got so far as to stand, with his feet well apart, his hands thrust deep into his trouser pockets, regarding the visitor with a sort of defiant smile. Mr. Issachar also seemed to gain in impudence.

"I suppose, Mr. Adair, we're right to try to get our money, although we are not quite good enough for a fine gentleman like you. You are looking different from what you were the first time I saw you, Mr. Adair; or, for the matter of that, the last time. Isn't he, Daniel?"

"A bit of money does make a difference in the appearance of a man. You look, Mr. Adair, as if you'd been wallowing in it all your life. Mr. Adair looks quite the aristocrat, doesn't he, Issachar?"

"Every inch of him. Wonderful, Mr. Adair, how a man's real character does come out; any one could see now that you're a gentleman born and bred."

"When you have both quite finished, and before you have wasted all your sweetness, let me ask if you expect me to believe a word you say. You pair of liars!"

The speaker smiled as he said this, in a way his listeners did not seem to like.

"I'm going to offer you a choice of courses. You can either persist in the statement you have just now made, in which case it will become a matter for the police; or you will exhibit for my inspection the whole contents of this room, and I will take away with me such papers as it is quite clear you must have stolen from Creed in the first instance, and in the second instance—what is much more important—from me.

"I will give you a minute to make up your mind which of these courses you will select. In the event of your choosing neither, I will offer you a third alternative. If you prefer it, I will take the law into my own hands, treat you both to a thrashing, drop you, if necessary, out of the window, and find out, without your assistance, what stolen property of mine you have in your possession. To begin with, I want that bill of sale on the Dovecote."

SOME of Mr. Issachar's courage had evaporated again, as his tone showed.

"You—you really aren't treating us fairly, Mr. Adair; you really aren't. But if you'll allow me to say a few words to my partner in private I'll see what we can do."

"Everything you have to say to Daniel, or Daniel has to say to you, you'll say out loud, where you are. Be quick, please! I want that bill of sale on the Dovecote."

Mr. Daniel tried to thrust himself into the breach.

"Let me explain, Mr. Adair—you really must. You know we're a lot of money out of pocket. Mr. Creed owed us no end——"

"Hand over that bill of sale, you thief and liar!"

"You mustn't use such language to us, Mr. Adair, you—you mustn't do it."

"If you have any claims against Creed's estate—which I don't believe—send them in to Mr. Foster. Now, as the auctioneer says, for the last time—are you going to hand me over that bill of sale?"

Mr. Issachar still tried to expostulate.

"If you'll only have a moment's patience, Mr. Adair—— Mr. Adair!"

Before the lawyer could complete his sentence, the visitor, coming round the table, had swept him and his chair away, and was opening the drawer in the table.

"I warned you, Issachar—now I'm going to look for myself."

Adair was dealing with the contents of the drawer with a freedom which pained the partners.

"Here, Mr. Adair!" cried Mr. Daniel. "We're not going to stand this. Those are our private papers; they're not yours. Issachar, you had better ring that bell."

"Yes, Issachar, you ring it; we shall want the police, no doubt, before we've done. I recognize a good many of these papers. You seem to have been stealing on a wholesale scale.

"I wonder how many people you have been treating as you have Miss Dennis—trying to get money out of them by means of threats, on the strength of documents which you have stolen."

Mr. Daniel, who was a little, thin man, just over five feet in height, made a sudden vicious dash at Adair who brushed him aside with so much vigor that he went toppling to the floor.

"Sorry if I've hurt you, Daniel; but if I have to drop you from the window it will hurt still more. Quite two-thirds of these papers are my property—you pretty rogues!"

Although his language was strong, Mr. Adair's manner was still urbane. He continued to examine the contents of the drawer, which he had now taken out of the table, with a thoroughness which at last brought at least Mr. Issachar to realize how much the visitor was in earnest.

"Look here, Mr. Adair, I'll make a clean breast of it. We have got some of Mr. Creed's papers; so there!"

"I can see you have. What you don't seem to realize is that they are mine."

"We did a lot of work for Mr. Creed, and we always gave him satisfaction. He was our chief client. When he died in—in that unexpected way, he rather left us stranded. We were handling a lot of things for him at the very time; he did owe us a good deal of money—I can show you the accounts.

"There was no one in Mitre Court to represent him; no one knew who was the heir, or what was to become of the business and property—no one knew anything. So we just went on, Daniel and I, very much as we had been in the habit of doing—representing his interests, dealing with matters just as he would have instructed us to do if he had been still alive. Then you come along—the heir to everything—and you kick us out.

"We were doing no harm; we were just doing what Creed himself would have done, and we were hurt by your treatment of us. There was no staff in Mitre Court, so we had some of the papers brought here for convenience in dealing with them. If you had approached us properly, we should have laid everything before you.

"But you didn't! From one or two words you let drop, and from one or two things which had got about, we gathered that you meant to let Mr. Creed's business go to pot, and not trouble about any of the people who owed him money. Under the circumstances, considering what he owed us, I don't think we're much to blame for having looked after ourselves.

"And that's the whole truth—and now you've got it. You can have the papers that belong to the estate—we never said you couldn't; and we'll render you an account of what Mr. Creed owed us, and perhaps you'll see it settled."

"Mr. Foster will see that everything is settled which is owing. As you say, you do seem to have a few papers of mine. I'm beginning to wonder if there's anything in the room which isn't mine."

Mr. Daniel had got up from the floor and was rubbing his elbow.

"Tell Mr. Adair, Issachar, that we'll make him an offer for Creed's business—a fair offer, based upon a proper valuation."

"Does that mean, Daniel, that you'd carry the business on if you had the chance?"

"Certainly, if you'd let us have it at a fair price. It is not a bad business, and one which we could handle nicely."

"I dare say; but you won't have the chance. Jerningham Creed was probably as great a thief as you are, possibly even greater—he made more money. I've not yet made up my mind what I am going to do with his ill-gotten gains, which, for some inscrutable reason, he passed on to me; but on this I am resolved—that his usurious business shall cease. All his present debtors shall be forgiven their debts——"

Mr. Daniel could restrain himself no longer; he had to interrupt.

"Good heavens, Issachar! Did you ever hear anything like that? All his present debtors shall be forgiven their debts! Did you ever hear anything like it?"

"Never, Daniel," replied Issachar.

Martin Adair quietly continued:

"Investigations shall be set on foot into the affairs of those who have been his debtors, and those who have suffered wrong at his hands shall to the best of my ability have their wrongs redressed. That being the case, you'll easily understand that the business is not for sale, and that I am unable to accept even the fairest offer you can make. I'll have nothing to do with usury, or with the fruits of usury, if I can help it; that's a solid and a simple fact."

CHAPTER VIII

REPRESENTING A SYNDICATE

FROM Messrs. Issachar and Daniel, Mr. Adair went to Mitre Court. On the oak which guarded the entrance to the chambers of the late Mr. Jerningham Creed was the sheet of cartridge-paper which Mr. Adair had himself affixed—he had not been to Mitre Court since he had placed it there. Across the legend inscribed upon it:

> OUT FOR THE DAY. BUSINESS SUSPENDED. CALL AGAIN.

some one had written with red chalk in bold characters, "Rot!"

While some one else had penciled in the corner:

> I've called ten times, with the money in my pocket—now I'll keep it. JAMES MAY.

As he read, Mr. Adair seemed tickled.

"The word 'rot' is tersely descriptive, and Mr. James May seems to be a persevering sort of man. After calling ten times he certainly seems entitled to keep his money."

Mr. Adair uttered this comment aloud. As he put the key into the lock he said something to himself.

"It's very odd, but the feeling is back again that Jerningham Creed is waiting for me inside." As he hesitated he listened. "If that's not his voice—surely somebody's inside the room."

He swung back the heavy oaken door. The door beyond, which of course was the one in ordinary use, was closed. He seemed puzzled.

"What possesses me directly I come here? There can be nobody inside, and yet I thought I heard——"

Fitting a key into the lock of the second door, he threw that back, stared for a moment at what was beyond, then passed the portal.

"My word! What an odor! It's like a vault; earthy, like a tomb."

Throwing up the windows, he looked about him.

"What an abode of desolation and dust and dirt and cobwebs! Something will certainly have to be done to make these rooms presentable. The sooner I put things in order the better. I don't know what it is that has prevented me doing it before, but certainly something has. I've a feeling that there's something about this place which isn't good for any one—especially for me."

His attention was caught by a heap of postal-packets which lay upon the floor.

"What a crowd of letters! I wonder if any of them require answering. I ought to attend to something, or some one ought. I'll have Foster in. He shall put the place in order; then out I'll go."

Picking up the letters, he threw them on to the great old leather writing-table which was in the center of the room, heedless of the clouds which arose as they fell. He examined some of the envelopes.

"It would only be decent to look what's in some of these things. Let's begin with this."

Tearing open an envelope he took out a sheet of paper on which were these typewritten words.

> A word of warning. You've got what isn't yours. Hand over and clear out, lest evil befall you. There are worse things than sleeping out on the Embankment, as you know. To the sneak-thief who calls himself Martin Adair—from a friend.

Mr. Adair read this singular communication two or three times over.

"So that's what is in Envelope Number One, is it? We've begun with it, and I think we'll end with it. I'm not at all interested to know what the rest of these missives are about—I've sampled enough."

He tore the sheet of paper into fragments, which he dropped upon the floor, then trod them under foot.

"What would Miss Winifred Dennis say if she read that friendly warning? She haunts this place almost as much as Creed himself. It was just after a quarter past two that Wednesday morning that she came down the stairs from this room. I had heard Big Ben striking the quarter just before—the wind was coming from that way. I wonder if she saw me.

"She took no notice of me if she did—no particular notice, that is: I am certain she never recognized me. Her face seemed to burn itself upon my brain. There was something on it which—I didn't like at all.

"What was she doing here at a quarter past two, that Wednesday morning? Shall I ever have courage enough to ask her? I wonder."

He gave himself a little twist, as if he were shaking something off him.

"I'm going to look into this and make

sure. Jerningham Creed is not going to haunt me all my life. In the first place, I'm going to make out why he left me all his money. There was a reason—I'm sure there was a reason; he was not the sort of man to do anything without a reason. I'm going to find out what that reason was.

"I take it that the explanation is somewhere in these chambers. That's why I'm so reluctant to let Foster, or any one else, come meddling—until I've found it. When I have, I'll have a bonfire made of everything that's in the place; it shall be made clean and sweet-smelling. The point is, where am I to begin to look?

"I'll work backward and begin with his private apartments. I've a sort of feeling that I shall find the reason there: in his bedroom, perhaps. That's what I'll begin with."

The bedroom proved to be in a state of the greatest disorder. Jerningham Creed had been done to death somewhere in the small hours of the morning. The theory was that he had heard some one in the office without, and had got out of bed to see who was there. The bed had never been remade. The bedclothes were thrown back, just as he had left them in his hurried rising. Mr. Adair threw up the windows as far as they would go—the air was fetid.

"This room will take some searching. Two safes, strong-boxes, cupboards; the man probably kept all his secrets hidden here. It may be a storehouse of hidden mysteries. I'll begin with this cupboard."

He had a big bunch of keys in his hand. After trying several, he found one which fitted the tiny keyhole. After a little manipulation the door swung open noiselessly.

"Lined with sheet-iron—if the whole door isn't iron. There ought to be something worth looking at in here."

There were a number of shelves divided into partitions of different sizes. In each, exactly fitting it, was a metal box. Mr. Adair saw them in amazement.

"There must be two dozen, at the least—probably more. They can't all be full of papers."

When he tried to take one out he found that it would not move.

"There's something queer about this. Are they fastened in? Aren't they made to come out? What are those little bosses?"

At the corner of each partition there was a sort of excrescence, as if they were all studded with tenpenny nails, which had been painted over with the rest of the woodwork.

"I wonder——"

The rest of the sentence was expressed not in words, but in action. Putting his thumb against one of these bosses, he pushed. It yielded; the metal case below came out of the partition a sufficient distance to enable Adair to grasp it. A moment after he had it in his hand.

"Now we don't seem to be any better off. The thing appears to have no lock, and no lid. I presume it has an inside, but how to reach it? Jerningham Creed was a more remarkable person even than I supposed. This cupboard and its contents must have represented considerable thought and much money."

He shook the case. It seemed to be made of steel, painted brown, and had a depth of perhaps six inches. It was about eighteen inches square. When Adair shook it something was audible within—something which rattled.

"That's not papers—it can't be money. A man like Creed wouldn't be such a fool as to hoard up money which brought him no interest. I'm going to get into this box if I have to break it open with the poker."

HE HAD not to resort to quite such a drastic measure. Turning the box over and over, and around and around, he could find nothing which suggested that there was any way in.

He was just deciding that he would have to break it open when, slipping from his hands, in falling one corner of it struck against the floor. When he picked it up it was open; apparently some hidden spring had been set in motion by contact with the floor. He raised the lid.

On the top was a thick layer of cotton wool. Quite what the contents of the box were which its removal disclosed he was for a moment at a loss to determine.

"It looks like odds and ends from a pawnbroker's window. What are they? Scraps of jewelry?"

He took something out.

"That looks like an ornament for a woman's hair. Is it paste—or diamonds? It can't be diamonds. If they were it would be worth quite a lot of money; yet if they're not, I don't know diamonds when I see them. Another hair ornament—another—

and another; I'm inclined to think that those are diamonds in each of them. If that is the case, then in this box there must be one of the finest collections of diamond ornaments for the hair in town.

"I didn't know Creed dealt in precious stones! How came he to be possessed of all these things? Hullo, there's something which is not an ornament for the hair—a cross, a Maltese cross; diamonds again. Those are diamonds! That's something rather unusual in crosses. It's odd, but I seem to have seen one just like it before. It recalls one my mother had."

Turning the cross over, he closely eyed the gold setting at the back. An exclamation broke from his lips.

"It is my mother's cross! There's the crest and the initials, just as I remember them. How came my mother's diamond cross to be in Creed's possession?"

He took out a diamond star and examined the obverse.

"My mother's again—crest and initials both! I've been living in a fog for some time, but this is beyond anything. There's piece after piece here of my mother's jewelry. They weren't her personal property, they were heirlooms; I have good reason to know that."

As he was still subjecting the contents of the box to the closest examination, without the slightest warning he leaped to one side, just in time to avoid something which whizzed through the air, and would have alighted on his head had he remained in his former position.

A singular-looking person had approached on noiseless feet from the rear; and had not some instinct warned him, would have stunned him with some weapon in the nature of a sandbag. Although taken so wholly unawares, Mr. Adair's self-possession never left him for a moment. As his assailant was making ready to strike again he seized his wrist, wrenched his weapon from him, and would have taken him by the throat.

But with a swift, wriggling, snake-like motion the man slipped out of his reach, swung around, and made off for his life. He was already at the door before Mr. Adair quite realized that he had failed to grip him. Although he moved as fast as he could, when he reached the offices he was only just in time to catch sight of the fugitive flying through the other door. As he was rushing out Mr. Adair all but cannoned into some one who was coming in.

"Hullo. hullo!" exclaimed a genial voice. "May I ask if you always come out of a room like this? Because if so, sir, you ought to sound a horn—or do something to let folks know that you're coming."

"As you came up the stairs," inquired Adair, "did you meet a blackguard running down?"

The stranger's reply was unexpected.

"How should I have known he was a blackguard if I had? Was it on a plate in front of him? As it happens, I met no one on the stairs; but as I was coming in from the street some one came out who seemed to be in rather a hurry. It struck me that he was a Chinaman."

"A Chinaman, was he? I thought he was something of that kind!"

"You seem agitated, sir. What is that you have in your hand?"

"This looks to me like a strip of old canvas, with a wad at the end, probably of sand. This is what I believe in a certain section of society is technically known as a sandbag. If it hadn't been that some instinct warned me, your Chinese friend would have laid me out with this."

"Pray don't speak of him as my friend, sir. I trust I have no friends of his stamp. I'm afraid I have come at rather an inopportune moment, but allow me to introduce myself. I am Maximilian Outerbridge—a name, I fancy, which is not unknown to you."

"Outerbridge!" Martin Adair eyed the stranger. "I fancy, sir, you are wrong."

"You must know the name if only because of the letters I have been sending you—to which, by the way, you have returned no answer. Which is one reason why I am here. You are Mr. Adair?"

"Oh, yes, I am Mr. Adair. So you've been sending me letters. To what address?"

"To this. I gathered that you were the present tenant of these chambers."

"If you sent them to me at this address I think it is possible that they're among that heap on the table. I haven't been so regular in my attendance as I might have been—letters have accumulated. What can I do for you, Mr. Outerbridge? I'm rather engaged just now, so if you'll come to the point in as few words as you can manage I'll be grateful."

The stranger was nearly six feet high himself. He was much broader than Adair; in the scales he would have weighed him down. He was a man of about forty, not bad-looking, with blue eyes, and a little, pointed, flaxen beard—not badly dressed, in a becoming suit of light-brown tweeds. The two men regarded each other as if each was trying to make out what sort of person the other was, and not altogether succeeding.

"I'll be brief enough. Have you got somewhere where I can sit, Mr. Adair? I can always talk better when I'm sitting down. Your chairs look as if they were covered with the dust of ages, and your table is worse. Here, I've got a paper; I'll sit on that."

Mr. Outerbridge placed himself on a sheet of newspaper which he spread out on a corner of the writing-table.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Adair? I like the man I'm talking to to sit down also, if he will."

"Thank you, Mr. Outerbridge; I think I'd rather stand. What can I do for you?"

"You're the heir to the late Mr. Jerningham Creed. I was in Constantinople when I heard of his unhappy end, and I at once wrote off to London to make inquiries."

"About what? To whom did you address your letter?"

"I addressed my letter to the representative of the late Jerningham Creed, Esquire. I think in view of what you said just now, if you will allow me to glance through this pile of correspondence I may be able to find that letter, as well as others."

"I shall be obliged, Mr. Outerbridge, if you will leave those letters alone. Thank you. What was in your communication, Mr. Outerbridge? What had you to do with the late Mr. Jerningham Creed?"

"I had a great deal to do with him, Mr. Adair, both in my private capacity and also as the representative of a syndicate. I did a great deal of business with Mr. Creed—sometimes to the extent of a hundred thousand pounds a year."

"That seems a large figure. I didn't know that Mr. Creed did business on quite that scale."

"Probably not. I fancy you knew very little about Mr. Creed, or his affairs. I'm told that you only made his acquaintance a comparatively short time ago, and that you were a sort of junior clerk in his office. I don't mean to be offensive, Mr. Adair; I'm just repeating to you what I have been told. Did he leave you everything?"

"He did—every stick and stone of which he died possessed."

"Is that so? I don't know whether to call you fortunate or unfortunate, Mr. Adair. Perhaps you have already discovered that to be Mr. Jerningham Creed's sole residuary legatee is not all lavender. It isn't all joy to be the heir of a man like he was. That little incident with the gentleman you were following in such a hurry when I came in suggests it."

"You haven't yet told me what you want with me, Mr. Outerbridge. I hope I have made it clear to you that my time is valuable."

"So is mine, Mr. Adair; so is mine. In one sentence, what I want from you, as the late Mr. Jerningham Creed's sole legal representative, is one hundred thousand pounds, more or less; in which sum Mr. Creed was indebted to me."

"Do you mean that, Mr. Outerbridge? Are you serious?"

"Never was more serious in my life."

"You can prove what you say?"

"You mean in a court of law? Well, that's it; that's just it, Mr. Adair; I fancy you know that's it."

"I know absolutely nothing, Mr. Outerbridge."

THE stranger's blue eyes had scarcely left Mr. Adair's face since he had come into the room. Before he answered he regarded him with a long and curious scrutiny.

"Is that the position you're going to take up, Mr. Adair? I hope not, for all our sakes."

"I don't in the least know what you mean, sir—you may believe that, Mr. Outerbridge. As you said, I knew very little about Mr. Creed; and the more I look into his affairs the less I find I know."

"Have you gone through—his little store, Mr. Adair?"

"I have not. I have gone through nothing."

"When are you going to start?"

"I can't tell you. I'm in no hurry; I'm content to take things leisurely."

"That may suit you, Mr. Adair, but it doesn't me. I represent a syndicate, and that syndicate is in a hurry."

"What do you call a syndicate, Mr. Outerbridge?"

"A syndicate in this case consists of a number of gentlemen interested in the same business. . . . One moment, Mr. Adair, let me go on. This syndicate, as I remarked, has been doing business with Mr. Creed for a good many years. A few days before he died I, acting on its behalf, consigned to him a parcel which—contained some extremely valuable trifles."

"They were the property of the—syndicate?"

"Yes, Mr. Adair, they were the property of the syndicate."

"Honestly come by, Mr. Outerbridge?"

"In what sense do you ask that?"

"I ask it as a plain man, Mr. Outerbridge. You seem to find it rather a delicate question to answer. You say you consigned a parcel to Mr. Creed—what did it contain? Can you give me details?"

"Of course I can give you details—exact details. If I give you those details, will you return me the contents of the parcel? You understand they're not your property, since Mr. Creed never paid for them. I have not the slightest doubt that he would have paid, but he hadn't time."

"Tell me what were the contents of the parcel, Mr. Outerbridge. Give me anyhow some idea."

"Will you return the goods if I do?"

"Have you an acknowledgment from Mr. Creed of the receipt of this parcel?"

"I have what is as good. It was registered. It was delivered to Mr. Creed by the postal authorities, and they held his receipt. What is the matter with you, Mr. Adair? Do you think I am telling you a lie? Surely you're not the sort—you're too good a sportsman—to take advantage of what happened to poor old Creed to do a number of hard-working men out of what I am ready to make perfectly clear does not belong to you."

"You possibly intend, Mr. Outerbridge, to pay me a compliment, for which I thank you. But you hardly present the matter from my point of view. There was something funny about Mr. Creed; I knew that all along. But I'm only just beginning to discover how funny. In fact, to be frank, I only began my discoveries just before you came into the room. Clearly you know a great deal more about him than I do."

"That is possible, since you pretend to know nothing."

"In what business are you engaged, Mr. Outerbridge?"

"I'm a dealer."

"A dealer in what?"

"Look here, Mr. Adair. Do let's begin to understand each other. Are you going to pay the sum which I shall be pleased to make clear to your commercial brain is owing, or are you going to return the goods? In the latter event, I should like them now, before I leave this room."

"I will certainly hand you over nothing—neither cash, nor what you call goods, before you leave this room. I am going to have matters thoroughly looked into. I have no doubt that Mr. Creed had a record of his correspondents; a communication will be sent to each of them. If they have any claim against the estate they will be requested to make it. Leave me your address. Such a communication shall be sent to you; anything you may say will receive the most careful consideration, and I give you my word that justice shall be done."

"I'm afraid that that won't quite do. The men I represent want their money now; and they're going to have it, or the goods today. Be a reasonable man, don't make trouble. Give me your word that if I establish the fact to your satisfaction that such and such things were sent to Mr. Creed on a certain day, which owing to what happened to him were not paid for, cash shall be handed over, or the articles returned; and I'll tell you the whole story so plainly that I guarantee you'll understand the business as well as I do.

"Give me your word, I say, and I'll start right now. Now, Mr. Adair, be a decent sort—give me your word."

There was a considerable pause before Mr. Adair spoke. It was odd how both men continued to eye each other, and how both smiled—and what a different quality there was in their smiles.

"Suppose, for argument's sake that the syndicate which you say you represent had consigned certain property, valuable property, to Mr. Creed which—we'll put it—wasn't theirs. If you were in my position you wouldn't return it to them. I'm sure you wouldn't. You're not that kind of man; you're too much of a sportsman."

"You know more than you pretend—that fact is gradually dawning on me."

"Yes? In what sense is that meant?"

"You convey the information not only by the things you say, and the way in which you say them, but also by something which is in your eyes, on your face, in your whole attitude, Mr. Adair. You know that you have no right to what Mr. Jerningham Creed, in one of his more humorous moments, left you—if only because, by the standard of an English court of law, to what he has left he had no right either."

"Is that so? Now we're getting out into the open, Mr. Outerbridge. You appear to be a gentleman of such keen intuition that I need not tell you that you are putting my suspicions into words."

"Your suspicions?"

"My suspicions! Are you hinting that they have been more than suspicions, that they amounted to exact knowledge?"

"Not at all. You're one of those men to whom I should be unwilling to hint anything they would rather I didn't. I don't like to use such words as hypocrite, and humbug, and others of that kind; so I'll just say that you're a clever man. And I hope you're clever enough to understand that I'm saying only what I mean when I tell you that the gentlemen I represent want these goods—their goods—today—now.

"I have here a little document which will give you full particulars of our side of the deal; with an exact description of the articles sent, the price at which they were valued—a valuation, mind you, accepted by the late Mr. Jerningham Creed—and other interesting items which you may find it worth your while to glance through."

Mr. Outerbridge had taken some papers from his breast pocket—was unfolding and offering them to Mr. Adair who stood a foot or two in front of him as he sat perched upon the corner of the table. Mr. Adair had made a half step forward, to get within reach of the proffered papers, when he swung suddenly round, just in time to see the door open noiselessly and a square-faced man, with yellow skin and slits for eye-holes, slip swiftly and stealthily into the room.

No sooner was he in than a lean, brown hand, appearing round the side of the door, suggested that some one else was close behind. Before there was time to see what belonged to the hand Mr. Adair had crossed the room, caught the square-faced man by the neck, torn the door open, flung him out, shut the door with a bang and slipped the bolt. He stood for a moment listening; then he turned to Mr. Outerbridge.

"Those, I presume, are some of the gentlemen you represent; there seem to be several on the landing. Do you imagine that —in that sort of way—you can get what I don't choose that you shall have?"

Mr. Outerbridge had remained immovable on the corner of the table. During the little scene which had just been enacted in front of him not the slightest change had taken place in his demeanor; he spoke now in the same easy, genial tone of voice.

"You take things a good deal for granted, Mr. Adair. You assisted that gentleman out of the room very neatly indeed. The inference would seem to be that he's a friend of yours; if he isn't, why should you conclude that he's an acquaintance of mine?

"Now would you just like to run your eye—since the little interlude is finished—over these one or two little papers of mine?"

THERE were two windows in the room—broad, old-fashioned ones. The panes of glass were almost wholly obscured by dirt. The sashes were thrown up as far as they would go. Instead of acknowledging the visitor's invitation to look at what he called his two or three little papers, Mr. Adair made a dash at one of these open sashes.

He got there just in time to seize a yellow wrist which was attached to a hand, the long fingers of which had suddenly gripped the sill. He slightly jerked the wrist—the fingers and the hand disappeared. He brought down the sash with a run, fastened it with a catch, and, without an instant's pause, passed to the window beyond—over the bottom of which a human head was rising.

He struck the face, when it came in sight, such a blow with his clenched fist that it vanished much quicker than it had appeared. He closed that window; then again he turned to Mr. Outerbridge who, still imperturbable, seemed to play the part of an indifferent spectator.

"What a remarkable sort of fool you and your friends must take me for! Do you think any of them are likely to try to effect an entry down the chimney?"

"Gently repudiating your suggestion that they're friends of mine—I really couldn't say. They appear to be persevering persons."

"They can persevere, Mr. Outerbridge, but they may find that there are occasions on which perseverance is vain."

"I think not; I really think not. Better be wise and give them what is their own."

"The way in which they, and you, are trying to get it proves that it isn't their own. However, I don't wish to enter into all that again. I wish you good day."

The visitor shook his head as one shakes one's head at a foolish child—with a twinkle in his eye.

"You're talking of what you don't understand, Mr. Adair. You'll have a swarm of wasps about you before you're very much older. You're trying to take their nest, and under those circumstances wasps sting. Now be sensible, Mr. Adair; hear reason."

"Which is it to be—the door or the window?"

Mr. Outerbridge eyed the speaker quizzically, then again he shook his head; he even sighed, as if troubled for the other's sake.

"Not the window—no, I'd rather not. If I must choose, I prefer the door; I've never left a room by means of a window yet." The speaker descended from his corner of the table to the floor. "Honestly, my dear friend—if you'll permit me to call you my friend——"

"I'd rather you didn't; I don't want you to insult me."

"Humorous, always humorous; and humor is such a gift. I was about to ask you, my dear enemy, before I leave the room—by the door—to listen to a word of wisdom. This may be the only chance you'll ever have. If you don't—later you'll be sorry."

"Then I'll be sorry." Adair was standing close up to the door. "If your friends are without, waiting to try a rush when I open the door for you, you favor them with a word of wisdom—recommend them to do nothing of the kind. Now, sir, stand just there, and the instant the door is opened go out or—you'll be sorry."

"Is this the exact position you wish me to occupy, Mr. Adair?"

"That will do. Now."

Adair slipped back the bolt, allowing the door to open perhaps eighteen inches, shot the visitor through it, closed the door again and made fast the bolt. He listened.

"They were outside; they're there now. Is he bestowing on them his words of wisdom?"

CHAPTER IX

THE BROOCH

AS MR. ADAIR that evening strolled up the lane toward what was for the present his home, he saw coming through the cottage gate a feminine figure—this time there was no doubt that the figure was feminine. At sight of him, the owner of the figure stopped

"You are Mr. Martin Adair?"

The gentleman addressed removed his hat. He was beyond the usual height of men, and the lady who put the question was under the average height of women. She wore so large a hat that she seemed lost beneath it; it was probably as many inches around as she was high. She had to tilt her head to look up at Mr. Adair—out of rather an impertinent pair of big gray eyes. The gentleman admitted his name. The lady continued:

"I am Mrs. Bishop Guy—a silly name, isn't it? Permit me—my card."

She took a piece of pasteboard out of the pink leather bag which she was carrying.

"I'm a friend of Winnie's—Winnie, as you probably know, is Miss Dennis. Miss Dennis has been telling me all about you; that is, she's been telling me a good deal about you. I've just been calling there, and as probably the oldest friend she has, I should rather like to make your acquaintance, Mr. Adair. You'll find my address on that card. Let me know when you are coming and I shall surely be in; and if you can make it an evening I shall be happy to introduce you to my husband, Mr. Bishop Guy. May I—may we—anticipate the pleasure of seeing you?"

"I shall be very glad to call upon you, Mrs. Guy—I should say Mrs. Bishop Guy—if you will be so good as to permit me."

"Oh, I'll permit you; I'll do more than permit you. I won't say I'll command you, but I will say that I wish you to come—at the earliest possible moment."

The little lady, inclining her head, passed on down the lane. The gentleman went on to the Dovecote. Miss Dennis opened the door for him, anxiety written large all over her. Before he had crossed the threshold she began on the subject which occupied her mind.

"They haven't fetched away the furniture; not yet."

"Have you been worrying yourself about that?" He smiled at her. "After what I told you this morning? You seem to have had very little faith in my words, Miss Dennis."

She said nothing; she only drew back a little so as to let him pass.

"If you will come with me into the sitting-room for a moment, I think I have good news for you, Miss Dennis. Will you not sit down?"

No, she would not sit down; she did not say so, she merely shook her head. They were in the sitting-room. Noticing the strained look in her eyes, and how she trembled, he wasted no time in prefatory remarks. Taking some papers from his pocket he placed them on the table.

"There, Miss Dennis, is your bill of sale. If you take my advice you'll tear it up and burn the pieces. There is a receipt in full for the amount which you erroneously suppose to be owing; there is a letter from Messrs. Issachar and Daniel, explaining that their communication of yesterday was written under an entire misapprehension, since they now find not only that you owe nothing but that they are actually in your debt. I believe they enclose the amount with which they credit you."

The girl looked at Mr. Adair. There was something in her pretty eyes which affected him most oddly; it was a look in which there was certainly suspicion—probably pain, possibly something which he could not diagnose. She said nothing—her silence was to him almost like an accusation.

She took up the papers he had laid down —first the bill of sale which she glanced at only superficially—then the receipt which she stared at very hard—then the letter from Messrs. Issachar and Daniel, every word of which she seemed to read carefully twice or thrice; and finally the bank-notes.

She took those up as if they were dangerous—as if she were afraid of them. Unfolding them, she examined each in turn, then slowly counted them. Having done so she looked up again at Mr. Adair, still with that queer something in her eyes. She laid the bank-notes on the table.

These performances of hers occupied a quite perceptible period of time. Mr. Adair, who had crossed to the other side of the room, observed them with what one felt was more interest than he cared to show—as if, for some cause, he was uneasy. There was no doubt about his uneasiness when once more he met the lady's eyes.

"Well," he asked, "what's wrong?"

One wondered if the question were meant to be humorous. Her manner was grave enough as she replied:

"What does this mean, Mr. Adair?"

"I'm afraid I don't follow you."

"This money has not been paid—by me; I still owe it. How come you to be in a position to present me with this bill of sale which was to serve as security for my debt? Who paid the money for which this is the receipt? Under what circumstances were Messrs. Issachar and Daniel induced to write this letter? It is a tissue of misstatements. They were not under a misapprehension; I did owe the money. As to the idea that they owed me money—it is too ridiculous! I ask you, Mr. Adair, what all this means."

"You're not willing to take the position for granted, Miss Dennis, without yards of explanation?"

"Have you paid this money?"

"Why shouldn't I—if I choose to make you my debtor?"

"Then it's you I owe the money to now. Is that what you mean?"

"If you prefer to put it in that way."

"Then the contents of the house are yours?"

The gentleman seemed to be at a momentary loss for an answer. He would have liked to tell her straight out that they were nothing of the sort, that they were hers—but he dared not. There was a quality in the girl's attitude which deprived him of his courage. He tried to temporize.

"How am I to answer you, Miss Dennis? If you insist upon it, the contents of the house are mine."

"It is not a question of 'if'; it's a question of fact." Her voice was cool, her manner a little hard. "Are the contents of this house yours, or whose are they, Mr. Adair? You realize that I must know where I stand."

"Of course." He turned ostensibly to place his cigar-case on the mantel, perhaps really to avoid her glance. "I trust you will find me a lenient creditor."

"But that's exactly what I don't want." He turned again to stare—there was a ring in her voice. "I don't want leniency; I want nothing to which I am not entitled. You must allow me to say, Mr. Adair, that most certainly I do not want a favor from you."

"You place me in an embarrassing position, Miss Dennis. Would you mind telling me exactly what you do want?"

Something flamed in her eyes.

"It doesn't matter." Putting up her hand she brushed something away. "What does it matter what I want! I quite realize that I am helpless; that since I can't pay, I must owe some one. And since you, as you kindly put it, are likely to be more lenient than—those lawyers, it may as well be you.

"But I can tell you this, Mr. Adair—that I'm going to pay that money to the uttermost farthing. I don't know how, and I don't know when, but if I live it shall be paid. As for these—" she picked up the banknotes—"I'm wondering if you meant them as a dole. I ought to be grateful if you did, but—I'm not! Because I keep a lodging-house, that is no reason why I should receive presents from my lodgers."

She stopped; he was speechless—the girl positively made him feel ashamed. Presently she went on, speaking with an evident effort to seem indifferent.

"I'm afraid I'm wasting my time, and yours. I ought to be getting your dinner ready. Should it be a few minutes late I shall have to ask you to excuse me."

SHE went out of the room, and he stood staring at the door which she had closed behind her.

"Of all the remarkable young women! Was there ever a man who thought he understood a creature of the opposite sex? I should like to introduce him to Miss Winifred Dennis. I had no idea, until I entered this room—dunderhead that I was—that from her point of view I was taking a liberty in doing as I have done. She has made it perfectly clear now.

"Of course I had no right to pay the money she owed; and, as a mere lodger of a few weeks' standing, I had still less right to make her a present of what to her is a large sum of money.

"Very well. I'll be her creditor; I'll hold the bill of sale on the contents of the Dovecote. Though what I'm going to do if she ever should offer to pay is beyond me altogether."

As he was about to gather up the papers which the lady had left behind her, his attention was caught by something which lay among them on the tablecloth.

"What's that? Isn't it the brooch she was wearing? It must have got loose and fallen without her noticing it." He took it up. "It's extremely absurd, but—are there visions about that I should seem to fancy I have seen so many things before? My mother had a brooch like this—it's again my mother—I remember it quite well.

"It was a peridot, I think; one of the finest specimens I ever saw. I remember my mother telling me that a peridot was one of the gems in the breastplate worn by the Jewish high-priest. Set in the center of the stone itself, in my mother's, just as is the case with this, was a pearl. You pressed it and the back flew open. Why, so does this! How very odd! In the back of my mother's brooch was a miniature of my father—and, as I'm his son—there it is!"

"I seem to have wandered into a world of coincidences. Finding my mother's jewels in that case in Creed's bedroom was strange enough, but to find that Miss Winifred Dennis had been wearing my mother's brooch seems to me to be a good deal stranger. By what amazing chain of circumstances can it have strayed into her possession?"

He was still staring at the brooch when the door reopened. As if unwittingly, he slipped the hand which held the brooch into his jacket-pocket. Miss Dennis came into the room. In her demeanor there was a subtle change—as if her pride had had a fall. Her voice was meekness itself.

"Mr. Adair, I was very horrid to you just now; I have come away from cooking your dinner to tell you so. I quite realize that you meant to be kind, and that you were kind. Quite frankly, I don't know what I should have done without you. I was in despair's last ditch when first you knocked at the door and asked to see the rooms. Before this, my mother and I would have been without a roof over our heads if it had not been for you. And—and now you've paid those horrid people what I owed them. I believe you meant to make me a present of the money."

"I did; I certainly did. I tell you that quite candidly, Miss Dennis. My point of view was this—I'm quite comfortable here, I couldn't be more so; which isn't strange, since you do everything you can for my comfort. I want to remain. It didn't seem to me to be a bad speculation, since I have, so to speak, a lot of loose money lying idle, to use some of it to make my position here secure. You can't very well turn me out, you know, if—if I've done my best to get you out of a rather unpleasant hole. That, I say, is my point of view, and it seems to me to be quite a sound one."

"You are rather casuistic, Mr. Adair, or should I say diplomatic? But your phrases don't hide from me the fact that your intention was to do me a very great service. I won't ask you why, just now, because I ought to be cooking your dinner, but afterwards I—I should like some sort of explanation, Mr. Adair. I felt that I had to come in to tell you how conscious I was that I had been horrid."

She was out of the room again before he could stop her, leaving him in a rather more confused state of mind than before.

"Now what is she driving at—that remarkable young woman? Is she my debtor, and am I to play the part of a relentless creditor or—or what part am I to play? She said nothing about the brooch, which is the most curious part of the whole curious business."

Withdrawing the hand which contained it from his jacket-pocket, he examined it again, more minutely even than before.

"There are my mother's initials at the back, and the crest. Their presence would settle the question of the original ownership if there was nothing else.

"I must try to think this thing out. What became of my mother's jewels I'm afraid I'm not in a position to say. It's possible that they went with the rest of the things. Everything was sold, and since some of them were worth a great deal of money, there is no reason why they should have been spared—except that a good many of them were family heirlooms. In which case they ought to have gone on to Louisa.

"Did we rob her of those as well—as everything else? With what holy thoughts she must think of us! We could not have stripped her more efficaciously had we been a band of brigands. And I did my share of the plundering better than any one else."

His thoughts had left the brooch and wandered afield. Now he brought them back to it, turning it over and over between his fingers, as if by dint of scrutiny he could find a key to the thing which puzzled him.

"I can understand how the jewels got to Creed. It was his business to advance money on anything. They may have stood to him as security for money lent; but Winifred Dennis? I can conceive of no possible explanation of how she came to be in possession of my mother's brooch.

"She doesn't seem to have missed it. When she does, I wonder if I shall have courage to ask how it came into her hands? I have not been afraid of many things, or of many people—I say it with all due modesty; but it's a truly singular fact that I am afraid of her. It really is extraordinary, considering that she's nothing but a girl. If she were a grown woman there might be some excuse—but a girl!"

CHAPTER X

A PUZZLE

THAT evening Mr. Adair's dinner consisted of a grilled sole and a roast chicken, both excellent of their kind. He ate of them with rather a sheepish air. Although he was hungry and the food was good, he was obsessed by the feeling that the cook was Miss Dennis. Relations between them had reached such a point that the consciousness of this fact filled him with a sense of vague discomfort.

Then she did the waiting; that worried him still more. She flitted in and out of the room rapidly, noiselessly, whisking things away, replacing them with others with a dexterity which struck him as remarkable. He was inwardly commenting on it all the while.

He wondered how many things she was doing at once. She brought in a dish, took another out, returned to her cooking, dished up the food—and did it all without the slightest hitch. When did she eat herself—she and her mother? He supposed they did eat sometimes.

When he had eaten his fill, and was disposed to look out on the world through rose-tinted glasses, then her real work began—the worst part of it. She had to wash up the plates and dishes and perform goodness only knew what other menial tasks besides for him. If he only had the courage to suggest to her that she should keep a servant!

There was a moment when he almost had the courage. When she was removing the crumbs from the tablecloth with a brass scoop, she observed—

"I'm afraid that chicken was overdone; I left it a little too long."

"Overdone?" He echoed her word. "Miss Dennis, I thought how perfectly it was cooked. I do not remember to have enjoyed a chicken more."

She glanced at him almost roguishly as she placed the crumb scoop on the tray.

"It's very nice to have a person like you in the house, Mr. Adair."

"That's good hearing."

"You are so easily pleased. You must know how things ought to be done, and how far I fall short of any decent standard, yet you pretend that I'm a paragon. You never complain; no matter what a mess I make of a thing, you always praise it. As I said, it is very nice to have a person like you in the house, but—sometimes I rather wish that you were a little more sincere."

"Sincere? Where you are concerned, to the best of my knowledge and belief I've been the soul of sincerity from the first moment I saw you until now."

"Why couldn't you say then that the chicken was overdone—when it was dried almost to a cinder?"

"I believe that on the subject of underdone and overdone tastes differ."

She interrupted him.

"I know what you're going to say." Removing the tablecloth, she began to fold it up. He interposed—

"I wish you'd let me help you to do that. Folding that great tablecloth is too much for one person; it fidgets me to watch you doing it."

She looked at him over the edge.

"I'm sorry to hear that it fidgets you; I had no idea it did that. Henceforward I will fold it up outside." She prepared to depart with the folded tablecloth over her arm; then something suddenly occurred to her. "By the way, did you notice if I left my brooch anywhere about the room?"

The fingers of one hand were at that moment fastened about the article to which she referred. He took it out of his pocket.

"You left it on the table when you went out of the room."

He held it out to her.

"Thank you. I was wondering where I had left it. I don't often wear a brooch, but I had a visitor this afternoon and I put it on in her honor."

Placing the brooch upon her tray, she was again about to leave the room when he stopped her.

"I don't wish to seem curious, and I assure you I have no intention to be impertinent; but may I ask where you got that brooch from?"

Turning, she looked at him with surprise.

"Some one gave it to me."

"Indeed? Still believe that I don't wish to pry into what does not concern me; but I can't help wondering how it came into the possession of the person who gave it to you."

The girl's face changed; the jaw seemed to grow squarer, the expression harder, a glitter came into her eyes.

"That I'm afraid I can't tell you. May I ask why you wonder? Is there anything about the brooch which is very remarkable?"

"Only that it was once my mother's."

For an instant or two it seemed that the girl failed to catch his meaning; then a flush came into her cheeks, only to die away.

"Mr. Adair! Do you really mean that this—this brooch of mine was once your mother's? How can you tell."

"I doubt if it is so commonplace as you appear to imagine. The stone is a peridot or chrysolite, as perhaps you know."

"I didn't know; I wondered what it was."

"Didn't the person who gave it to you tell you what it was?"

"No. He told me nothing."

"I believe you'll find that the peridot is an unusually fine example. The small stone in the center is of course a pearl. Do you mind, Miss Dennis, taking the brooch in your hand and pressing the pearl? Press it hard with your thumb."

Putting the tray on the table she did as he requested. Suddenly she exclaimed, as if startled:

"Why, what's happened? The back has come open; there's a miniature of a man inside."

"Miss Dennis, that man is my father. The miniature was done by Sir Thomas Lawrence; it was one of the few he did. I have always understood that my father gave it to my mother before they were married.

"When I was quite young I often remember seeing my mother wear it, although it was already old-fashioned. It was always one of her most valued possessions. She remained very fond of my father till the day she died. So you see, Miss Dennis, it has a singular interest for me; which explains my anxiety to know how it came into the possession of the person who gave it to you. Is that a point on which you think you could get me information, or could you present me to the donor?"

The girl left the question unanswered. Her thoughts were apparently moving on lines of their own.

"Then if this was your mother's brooch perhaps it's yours. To whom did she leave it when she died?"

"I fear that is more than I can tell you. I am only wondering if the person who gave it to you could put me on the track of its history."

Was it his imagination? Or had her lips blanched, the life and color faded from her face, what might have been a look of terror come into her eyes?

"Here is the brooch—it is clearly more yours than mine."

She put the brooch down on the table, speaking, it seemed, with an effort. Taking up her tray, she was once more about to depart when he stopped her.

"You misunderstand me, Miss Dennis. I have not the slightest intention of conveying the meaning you suggest. The brooch is not mine; it never was. Please don't leave it on the table. Take it with you."

"Thank you, Mr. Adair, you're very good —or at least I suppose you intend to be very good; but after what you have said nothing will induce me to touch that brooch again." Tray in hand, she paused at the open doorway. "It sounds very silly, but somehow I always felt that there was something about that brooch which I didn't like, which I was afraid of; but I couldn't imagine what it was. Now I know. So far as I am concerned you're perfectly welcome to your mother's brooch, Mr. Adair."

The girl had vanished; the door was closed. Mr. Adair had risen from his seat and stood staring at the brooch which she had left upon the table.

"This seems to be a pleasant atmosphere I'm living in—and she's a really remarkable girl. If she were my——" He seemed to stop himself with a little jerk, as if confused; then substituted another form of words. "If I'd known her longer than I have, and had the honor to be on more intimate terms with her, I perhaps might induce her to behave more like a reasonable being. As it is——

"Hang me, I can't help feeling that there's some queer story about that brooch; the way she looked at me, the way she behaved, the way she left it behind—I can't help feeling that if she had chosen she could have thrown a good deal of light upon its history. She's upsetting me. She's getting on my nerves in a way I don't understand."

He thrust his fingers into his waistcoat pockets—some men have a trick of fidgeting with their fingers when they need a safety-valve; when he withdrew them, in the fingers of his right hand was a piece of pasteboard. It was not his custom to change for dinner. He felt that if he were to sit down to the meal in a dinner-jacket, the fact that Winifred Dennis was his general servant would worry him still more; so it chanced that he was still wearing the suit which he had had on when he encountered the little lady coming down the lane as he went up. The piece of pasteboard which he had discovered in his waistcoat pocket was the card she had given him. He glanced at it.

"Mrs. Bishop Guy? Who on earth—— Oh, of course. She asked me to go and see her. What's the address? Redcliffe Mansions? That's not so very far off. Why shouldn't I go and see her tonight, now? It isn't late. I can only find her out, or she can refuse to see me.

"I don't believe it's ordinary curiosity —I don't think I'm that sort of man. But I've reached a point at which if I don't find out something from some one about Winifred Dennis, and her mother, and the Dovecote generally, something will crack.

"I can't ask her; I simply can't. If I did she wouldn't answer.

"But I'm going to learn something about Winifred Dennis before I turn into bed tonight if I can, if I have to go to Redcliffe Mansions in search of it. What's more, I'll start at once."

And he started. The brooch he left upon the table.

CHAPTER XI

IN REDCLIFFE MANSIONS

MRS. BISHOP GUY was in, and Mr. Bishop Guy also; both of them were willing to see him. They had a small flat up on the third floor; the sitting-room into which Mr. Adair was shown was one of those diminutive chambers which one seems only to find in flats. Mr. Adair apologized for his appearance.

"I have taken very quick advantage of your invitation, Mrs. Bishop Guy; to have met you only this afternoon, and to be trespassing on you at this hour of the same day, is daring. My excuse is that something you said made me very anxious to see you."

"My anxiety is certainly equal to yours. We both wanted very much to see you—didn't we, Augustus?"

Augustus was Mr. Bishop Guy. He was not very much taller than his wife, had sandy hair, gray eyes, and a mustache.

"Very pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Adair. My wife has been talking about nothing else but you ever since she came in. What will you have to drink?"

"Nothing, thank you—at least just now."

"Directly Augustus sees a man he asks him what he'll have to drink. He seems to think that they are like certain plants which have always to be kept moist. Mr. Adair, where have I seen you before?"

Adair looked at the lady. She had on a sky-blue dress of rather complicated design, which became her very well. Although she was no longer a girl, she was still young enough to be charming.

"I'm quite sure I have never seen you before. I should not have forgotten you if I had."

The visitor said this with an emphasis which made the lady smile.

"It's very nice of you to say so, Mr. Adair—I presume you intend to be complimentary; but if I haven't seen you before I've seen some one very like you. When I saw you coming up the lane this afternoon I said to myself, 'Where have I seen this man before?' "

"My wife," explained her husband, "is always thinking she has seen people before, or some one exactly like them. It's a way she has."

"That isn't true, Augustus; and you've no right to say so. Husbands, I have already discovered, Mr. Adair, are apt to say things which they have no right to. So you're living at the Dovecote. Are you comfortable?"

"I could not be more so; I am almost guiltily comfortable."

"How do you mean guiltily? In what sense can one be guiltily comfortable?"

"I understood you to say this afternoon that you were a friend of Miss Dennis."

"I am—her oldest friend. I won't say her only friend, although I fear I'm not very far from being that—that is why I wished to see you."

"Is she susceptible to your influence, as a friend ought to be?"

"That I couldn't say, until you've explained further. In which direction do you wish me to use my influence?"

"May I take it that nothing I say to you will be repeated to her?"

"Can I count in the same way on you? I'll be as silent as the grave if you will."

"Then that's agreed. Now, Mrs. Bishop Guy, since you are her friend can't you use your influence to induce her to keep a servant?"

She laughed, as if she found the gravity of his manner amusing.

"You seem very serious. Why are you so anxious she should keep a servant?"

"Isn't it obvious? My feeling on the matter is purely selfish."

"I'm sure it is, since you are a man."

"She does everything about the house, performs the most menial tasks—for me. Clearly she is a lady——"

"She certainly is a lady."

"Very well, then. I have some claims to be—I won't say a gentleman, but something thereabouts; and I'm supposed to sit still and let her do what no lady ought to do for a man, and not move a finger or volunteer the least assistance. Until recently she cleaned my boots."

"Who else was there to do it?"

"Who else? I'm such an idiot that it never dawned upon me till the other day that she'd do a thing like that; when it did—well, since then I've cleaned them myself. She sweeps and she dusts, she goes down on her knees on the carpet in my sitting-room to sweep up my cigar ash. I don't know how she feels, but the idea of her doing things like that for me makes me hideously uncomfortable."

"She's your landlady's daughter, practically your landlady; you're her lodger—her only source of income."

"You don't really mean that all the money she has she gets from me?"

"I do; I'm pretty sure that she doesn't get a penny from anywhere else."

"But how does she live? What's the rent of the house?"

"I'm afraid she does not live very well; so how is she going to keep a servant?"

"Of course I'll pay for one. Mrs. Bishop Guy, I want to be frank with you."

"That's what I want you to be, Mr. Adair."

"I'm not a poor man; I'm—well, I'm not at all badly off."

"It's such a pleasure to hear of some one who isn't badly off; every one I know seems to be nearly starving."

"I've no one to spend my money on but myself——"

"How delightful! I wish I hadn't—that is, if I had any to spend. I have a husband on whom I must spend mine."

The husband referred to interposed.

"I like that! When did you spend any of your money on me?"

"I spent one-and-ninepence of my own on the housekeeping only last week, which you owe me to this hour. Well, Mr. Adair? You were saying——"

"I'm prepared to spend a reasonable sum of money on—on——"

"Your own comfort."

"On my own comfort. Exactly; thank you, Mrs. Bishop Guy. Can't you induce Miss Dennis to see this and listen to reason? I'll take all the expenses of the house on my hands, provide a proper staff of servants——"

"It's come to a staff of servants now, has it? I thought just now it was only one."

"It requires more than one servant to do the work of that house properly."

"I suppose that means that Winnie hasn't done it properly. I'll tell her what you say."

"It means nothing of the kind! On the contrary—of course you're only laughing at me. I want the household affairs to be put on a proper basis; Miss Dennis not to act only as my landlady's daughter, but to superintend everything, and actually to be suitably remunerated for what she does."

"What would you call suitable remuneration in a case like that?"

"That's a matter for consideration. I would pay her what she asked."

"Would you? I should like to superintend that establishment of yours if you'd pay me what I asked. It would be better than being married to Augustus."

"I know Miss Dennis sufficiently well to be sure that her demands would not be extortionate."

"You seem to have a very high opinion of Miss Dennis."

"I have; the highest."

"Have you had very much to say to her? Plenty of friendly little chats?"

"Not one. Until today I doubt if I have exchanged a dozen consecutive sentences with her. She keeps me at something more than arm's length."

"Does she? Perhaps she hasn't such a high opinion of you as you have of her."

"That's very possible. That's why I wish you to use your influence with her on my behalf. How long have you known Miss Dennis?"

"Nearly all my life. Her father was a Devonshire parson. His living brought him in less than a hundred and twenty pounds a year. He had a little money of his own, on the interest of which they practically lived; he tried to make it more—with the usual result. He got into the hands of rogues who swindled him out of every penny. He was in bad health when the news came and it killed him. He left a widow, a son, and a daughter. Has Miss Dennis spoken to you of her brother?"

"Not a word. I didn't know she had one."

"CHARLIE DENNIS was quite a nice boy. When his father died he was preparing for the Indian Civil Service—for the Indian Police. I think his prospects of passing were good. His father's death put an end to that; he had to turn out there and then to earn his bread and cheese. It turned his head."

"Do you mean that he went insane?"

"To all intents and purposes. I don't know quite what he did do, but I know it was what he ought not to have done. He got himself mixed up with a lot of very queer characters and did something which brought him into contact with the police. The discovery that he had done this did for his mother, all in an instant."

"It killed her?"

"It would have been almost better if it had. He was in the house, talking to her—she hadn't a suspicion that anything was wrong, and she was very fond of her boy—when a policeman marched into the room and said that he had come to arrest him. He knocked the policeman down, rushed through the door and escaped.

"Not only did the policeman go down, but his mother went down also; her boy had hurt her more than the policeman, for she never rose again. She had a stroke—she is now entirely paralyzed; has never spoken since, and practically never moved.

"Winifred Dennis has not only had to act as general servant to you, Mr. Adair, she has had also to wait upon her mother hand and foot. The old lady can do absolutely nothing for herself and is wholly dependent upon her daughter. Luckily God has given her a very good one."

"What an awful tragedy! I had no idea of it."

"Winifred Dennis is not the sort of person to speak of her private affairs to any one—least of all to a man whom she has only known for a few weeks, and whose only claim to her acquaintance is that he pays her for the rooms he occupies."

"Is that the way she looks at it?"

"In what other way could she look at it? She knows nothing about you, Mr. Adair. You have sense enough to see what a delicate position she occupies. Did she ever speak to you of me?"

"No; I tell you she has spoken to me of no one—except her mother."

"I was her lodger. She took the Dovecote because I agreed to take her rooms. I was a medical student in those days, at a woman's hospital in Gray's Inn Road; I'm a qualified medical practitioner now, and entitled to practise on my husband—or on you. Then Augustus came along, and he worried me; so at last, to keep him still, I married him."

"That's it, state the case correctly. Mr. Adair has only to look at us to know it was all the other way—that all the worrying came from you."

This, of course, was Mr. Bishop Guy. The lady ignored his interposition.

"The original idea was that when we were married we should live at the Dovecote, but to this Augustus wouldn't agree."

"I should think not. I didn't want to start my married life in lodgings."

"So, in order to give the man no just cause for offense, I left the Dovecote and came here—and I'm afraid that I left Winnie rather stranded. What would have happened if it hadn't been for you I don't know. When I heard of your appearance on the scene I sang a *Te Deum.*" The lady, rising from her seat, crossed to a table which was in a corner of the room. "I think, Mr. Adair, if I were now to offer you a little refreshment it might be welcome. Soda or plain water."

"Soda, please. Thank you." He took the glass the lady offered him.

"Augustus, you can help yourself; confine yourself principally to soda. I wonder, Mr. Adair, if you would tell me anything about yourself if I suggested that I was interested—on Winnie's behalf."

Mr. Adair, having helped himself from the tumbler, seemed to be considering.

"I can give you a banker's reference, Mrs. Guy, if that would be of any use. I think that my banker would convince you that I am a responsible person."

"Is that the only person to whom you can refer me?"

"I'm not in a position to refer you to my relations, if that is what you mean. My father and mother are both dead; with such other relatives as I have, I am not at this moment on very good terms. Do I strike you as being the sort of person who requires—credentials, other than can be obtained from his banker?"

"One likes to know with whom one is dealing when circumstances seem to promise intimate relations with a person, doesn't one, Mr. Adair? However, as you hint, a banker's reference is a great deal. It's more than some of us can give. I doubt if my banker would go out of his way to convince you that I'm a responsible person, and I've no doubt whatever about Augustus."

"You wait a bit, Ella; before very long I shall be on the high-road to millions."

"Millions of what—farthings? I don't know what sum of money a million farthings represents, but I do hope that one day you will get at least within sight of it. But I'm afraid you're a long way from it now.

"Augustus is an inventor, Mr. Adair. Really he's a dealer in Manchester goods, calicoes and huckaback and that sort of thing—we're people of no importance; but he doesn't see such golden prospects in Manchester goods as he would wish, so he has directed his surplus energies into other channels. Tell Mr. Adair what you've invented, Augustus."

"He wouldn't be interested. Ella, what a nuisance you are! I shall have to do something, sir, to keep her in order. She's small——"

"And you are large—three-quarters of an inch taller than I am."

"Her microscopic dimensions don't keep her from being active; you never know who she'll be getting at next. Of course——"

The wife in question cut him short.

"Augustus, show Mr. Adair what you have invented. Mr. Adair, aren't you interested in what Augustus has invented?"

Adair smiled; he seemed to find the attitude of these two people towards each other amusing.

"If it's no secret, I should very much like to know how Mr. Bishop Guy proposes to make his millions."

"Then if he won't tell you I will. It's certainly no secret; the sooner the announcements of those two inventions are on the boardings and occupying whole pages in the papers the better. They're very practical inventions, Mr. Adair, as befits a dealer in Manchester goods. The first thing he has invented is the new-silk. It doesn't sound very imposing, does it?"

BEFORE the visitor could reply the husband took up the tale where his wife had left it—as she possibly knew would be the case.

"It mayn't sound imposing, but before many years have passed it will be a staple article in all the world's markets. It will be found in all houses in civilized countries, and, in some form or other, on the person of every man, woman and child."

"The new-silk? What is it?"

"In the first place, I perhaps need not tell you that there's no silk about it. It is a method I have discovered of treating substances which do not contain silk so that they become more silk than if they were silk—that sounds Irish, but it is a fact. I'll show you samples." The little man put upon a table a cardboard box which contained a number of small pieces of material, of all textures and of all colors. "Now, are those silk, or aren't they? Handle them; feel them; put them into water—do anything you like with them!"

"They appear to me to be silk."

"Of course they do, and of the very finest quality, mind you. You couldn't get silk like that, twenty-two inches wide, wholesale, for less than four shillings a yard. Now I'll give it to you seventy-two inches wide for eighteenpence.

"You pay sixty shillings a dozen for silk handkerchiefs at least; I'll give you a finer quality for eighteen. Think what a future there is for a thing like that—wear guaranteed, fast colors, washable, fine as the finest linen, or thick and heavy as a blanket; and that's the new-silk. Can't you see it knocking the mediocre stuff for which the worms are responsible out of the market?"

"I can conceive of it having a great sale."

"I should think you could. There's no commonplace fortune in it; there's millions! I shouldn't wonder if Carnegie, Rockefeller, Pierpont Morgan, and Rothschild, all those fellows, were taught a bit about what it means to have money.

"There. That's one of my inventions, Mr. Adair. The other is a very simple thing, yet a thing which the world has been looking for—well, since Eve sewed herself a garment of fig leaves. It's a fastener. A woman puts it down the back of her dress instead of hooks or buttons—with a touch it is locked. I call it the lock-fastener. There will be no gaping, no ventilated plackets. Here it is; see for yourself. It can't come undone. Yet at a touch—you see! It's open."

Mr. Bishop Guy placed a number of small articles, fashioned in different substances, beside the cardboard box.

"The lock-fastener can be used for gloves, for boots, for masculine and female garments of every sort and kind; and what's more, sir, it can be used for doors and windows. A window secured by my lock-fastener won't rattle, and a burglar will find it a tough proposition. It can be used for everything and 'anything for which a fastener is required. There's a fortune in the new-silk, but I'm not sure that there isn't a bigger one in the lock-fastener."

"And yet," observed the lady, "we occupy this sumptuous apartment on the third floor, dimensions twelve foot by ten and a half, and Augustus owes me one and nine."

"And yet it seems to me that there might be money in your husband's two inventions."

"Might be! Might be!" Mr. Bishop Guy positively jumped in his desire to be emphatic. "You wait with your might be."

"When are they coming on to the market?"

"That's just it—when are they? They're fully protected; every process and every detail patented in every country in the world—and that has cost money; practically all the money I have. Now I'm looking for a capitalist who'll launch these things, and who won't want the whole bag of tricks for himself, but who'll leave me some of the profits. I'd have no difficulty in finding men who'd put up money; big manufacturers would do it next week; but they'd want seventy-five, eighty or eighty-five per cent. of the profits. I'm not treating on those lines after all I've gone through—my hopes and dreams."

"On what lines would you treat?"

"Fair and honest lines, on a reasonable basis."

"How much money will be wanted?"

"I couldn't exactly say. Production on a modest scale could be managed for quite a small sum; to supply the world's markets would require a large capital. I could start with five or ten thousand pounds. I should want a hundred thousand or more if I succeeded as I'm sure I shall. But of course the great thing is to make a start, and I haven't five thousand pounds."

"I might provide the money on what you call reasonable lines, if you could satisfy me as to the value of your inventions."

"What—you? But you don't think I had you in view when I began to talk?"

"It so happens that I've a good deal of loose cash for which I'm seeking an opening. Presuming that you prove to my satisfaction that you're an honest man, Mr. Bishop Guy, and that these two inventions of yours are real good things, I might do worse than invest it in them."

"You certainly might do that; there's no doubt about it—you know there's no doubt about it, Ella! What do you call a good deal of loose cash, Mr. Adair?"

"I might begin with twenty-five thousand pounds, and later I might find a hundred thousand."

The little man gasped; he seemed to have grown taller; his whole face shone.

"When—when would you be able to find the money if—if everything is satisfactory?"

"Tomorrow, the day after, next week—whenever you want it."

"And you have twenty-five thousand pounds which you can get at with a stroke of the pen? Mr. Adair, give me your hand. My wife's a simpleton; and as for Winifred Dennis—when it comes to the serious things of life women don't count. Fancy wanting a man to give what my wife calls an account of himself when he's good for twenty-five thousand pounds with a stroke of his pen! And as for the satisfaction you want, Mr. Adair, you shall have that. If you allow me to go into certain details with you, I think you'll agree that for your loose cash I shall offer you a very sound investment."

CHAPTER XII

THE SECRET OF THE TABLE

MARTIN ADAIR spent several days in the chambers at Mitre Court. He made several surprising discoveries. Almost the first one was the possibility of securing the chambers so that they resembled the strong-rooms in safety deposit companies. A sheet of rolled steel had been inserted into the wall in such a manner that by turning a handle it ran right across the outer door. If intending felons got through the oak and the outer door there would still remain that steel for them to tackle.

Then there were guards for the windows in the shape of steel shutters which rose up and covered them. If those safeguards had been in regular use by the late Mr. Jerningham Creed he could hardly have come to the end he did. Adair came to the conclusion that they had scarcely ever been used—that they had been intended for emergency purposes which in the old man's judgment never had arisen.

"I believe," he told himself one day when he had got all these ingenious contrivances in their places, "that his idea was not to use them as protection against thieves, but as safeguards against their natural enemies—the police. For years he must have gone in fear of the police; what beats me is how he continued to be immune. He must have known that the moment the police got wind of what he had in here, it meant penal servitude for life. Also, possibly, he used these steel doors and shutters on certain days or nights in the year when he went in for a sort of general stock-taking."

Another discovery which Adair made was of a most surprising kind. It took the shape of a secret door in the old man's bedroom. A full-length picture of a fine lady in the gorgeous raiment of the eighteenth century hung at the foot of the bed. It had apparently never been touched with a duster for years.

Not only was the frame almost obscured, but the picture itself was covered with such an accumulation of dirt that it was not easy to make out if it was good or bad. Adair lifted it down one morning to see what was on the back; he had learned to look on everything which the room contained as having something about it which was not upon the surface. He thought that he could examine that picture to more advantage if he had it at close quarters.

Directly he got the picture down he found that at any rate there was something odd about the wall against which it had been hanging. There was one of those indentations on its surface which he had learned to know always meant something. The wall was not papered; it had originally been painted a sort of stone-blue, but that was many years ago.

Where that indentation was, not only the paint but the plaster was broken away. Part of what seemed like an iron knob, which had once been hidden, was seen quite plainly. Adair pressed it; a sort of panel, some six inches square, came open—and there was a door handle. He turned the handle; a door, yielding, revealed an aperture which was just large enough for a person to squeeze through. It was raised perhaps eighteen inches from the floor; there were steps beyond, which descended through a narrow, winding sort of tunnel.

"Where does that go to?" he asked himself. "What's beneath this room? Can it be a sort of secret passage to the street? There's a house on the other side of this wall, and beneath these rooms there are offices. What's the name of the people to whom they belong? Latraille, Olgano & Co. I've seen the name often enough in the board at the door."

He hesitated, then decided to push his investigation further. It was not very easy. If not very broad, he was more than usually tall. He had difficulty in squeezing through the narrow doorway.

"If I stick fast I'm done. Since the whole place is steel-plated I may call and call; even if any one hears they won't be able to come to my assistance. So let us hope that I shan't stick."

He almost did, more than once. The steps seemed too narrow when he had descended two or three; for some interesting moments he thought that he really had got jammed. He held his breath to make himself as small as possible. He writhed and struggled, then found himself on a lower step, and a lower; then, squeezing round a corner, he was in utter darkness. The light had vanished from above, by reason of the turnings and twistings of the steps; there was blackness below. He descended another step or two, then came into contact with what seemed to be a blank wall.

"This is extremely nice! I suppose I've ruined my clothes, if I haven't torn most of them right off me; it isn't likely that these walls are spotless. I must have wiped them clean. I have perhaps removed from them the deposits of ages. What's this thing in front?"

He struck out with the palm of his hand.

"Is that a wall? Or a door? I believe it's a door. Somehow it had a hollow sound." He struck again. "It is a door. How am I to get it open." He moved his hand over the surface. "That feels like a handle. It is. How do you open the thing? Naturally, since it once had something to do with old Creed, there's some trick about it; of course it doesn't turn like an ordinary Christian handle. Push, pull, right, left; hullo!

"I don't know what I did, but something yielded—the door is open. It seems to be smaller than the one I came in by; this is going to be a squeeze. I have got through alive; if it had been one inch smaller in any direction I never should. Pray, where and what may this place be? It looks as if it might be an office. I believe it is. Sure——"

He strode forward. He was standing in a good-sized room in which was the usual furniture of the ordinary office; desks, writing-tables, leather-seated chairs, deed-boxes on shelves, a painted cupboard, a shabby bookcase through whose glass doors, dim with dust, could be seen what might be a miscellaneous collection of odd volumes treating of the law. As he neared the writing-table which stood in the centre there was a clicking sound. He stopped, staring about him.

"What was that? It seemed to come from the table. More diversions? Can this be the office under Creed's chambers, in the occupancy of Messrs. Latraille, Olgano & Company? Can the gentlemen belonging to those high-sounding names be myths, or dummies; and was the business carried on here a branch of that done by Mr.

Jerningham Creed above? The more one investigates the private affairs of that estimable old gentleman the more surprising they become.

"I remember that I never did see any one come out of this office; and once when I ventured to ask the old gentleman what sort of business was carried on below, since I never saw any one about, he nearly snapped my head off. He was a smallish man, but he had a powerful knack of snapping. I'd wager that no one has been in this room since the old man died. There do appear to have been visits from the postman."

A number of letters lay in a heap on the cocoanut matting close to the door. Mr. Adair picked them up.

"All addressed to Messrs. Latraille, Olgano & Co. I wonder what business they carried on. They seem to have come from all the cities and countries of the world. Here's one from Japan. Would it be a breach of confidence if I were to look what's inside? Anyhow—here goes.

"Why, what language is this? I'm not likely to be much wiser. The thing appears to be in Japanese. Surely old Creed wasn't a polyglot to the extent of understanding Japanese! Here's a letter from Paris."

Tearing the envelope open, he studied what was within.

"I thought I did understand French, and this is written in French, but it's double Dutch to me. The writer, who attaches no signature and gives no address, says that he has despatched a packet of crumbs, having removed the crusts, fresh from the oven; and he requests that the loaves may be placed in the usual bread pan. If that isn't what it means I don't know what it does mean, and what that means is beyond me altogether. Messrs. Latraille, Olgano & Co. seem to have had at least one eccentric correspondent."

As he returned toward the center of the room he again heard the clicking sound.

"That certainly came from the table. There's something queer about that piece of furniture; I'll have a try at finding out what it is. Most of the articles about these premises seem to have peculiar properties."

Laying down the letters on the top of the table and starting to move it from the spot on which it stood, he found that it refused to budge.

"That so? It's fastened to the floor; I thought it might be. There's a spring in the floor which, when I stepped on it, clicked. Not having been used just lately it's probably a little rusty. That spring is connected with something in this table, probably it runs up the inside of one of the legs. Now what is there in this table which is actuated by a spring on which, when you cross the room, you are bound to tread?"

HE EXAMINED the table with curious minuteness. In it were two drawers. Both of them were locked. After some little difficulty he pried them open with a tool which he had in his pocket, telling himself as he did so:

"I'm getting to be an expert burglar; with a little more practise I shall become proficient. Then I'll be able to get into any strong-room with a bent hairpin, as a really expert burglar is supposed to do.

"There doesn't seem to be anything in these drawers except papers and memoranda and that sort of thing. No doubt there's a lot of interest attached to them, which I'll go into later; but they're not what I'm looking for just now. Let's have the drawers right out—that is, if they'll come."

He withdrew them entirely from the table—they came quite easily.

"There's nothing peculiar about these drawers so far as the eye can see. Perhaps it's in the table itself. Let me walk across that spring again."

He did not at once succeed in finding what he sought. He crossed between the table and the door; between it and the aperture through which he had come. Nothing clicked.

"That's life—when you don't want a thing you've got it; when you do it's never there. Something did click—twice, I'll swear—as I was standing just about here. Perhaps I've eased the spring so that it moves noiselessly, as it was no doubt originally meant to do; or perhaps my imagination is a little keenly set, as after being in an atmosphere of this sort is only to be expected, and I heard something quite commonplace and thought it was something strange. There's one thing against that; why is the table fastened to the floor? Let's look the whole thing over again."

Going down on his knees, he studied the table from the front, putting his hand under the edge to see if there were anything unusual in its construction beneath.

"Those drawers don't go right across the table. There's room for two more on this side. There don't seem to be any signs of them; but if there is nothing there, why is the table boarded up beneath? I've a mind to drive my chisel right through the woodwork. What can I use for a hammer? Perhaps I can manage without one. There seems to be a sort of crack right across the woodwork just under the edge. If I can get the point in that I can manage the rest."

He found that he had not undertaken an easy task; the keen edge of his cold-chisel declined to allow itself to be inserted into the crack in the wood. Striking the butt with his clenched fist was no use; he needed something with which he could strike a more telling blow. There seemed to be nothing available; there were no fire-irons in the rusty grate, nothing heavy anywhere.

"It seems that I'm not expert burglar enough to drive a chisel into hard wood without some sort of hammer. How about moving the table itself? How about getting it upside down? I'll try that."

At the first trial the table remained immovable; it resisted all efforts to push it. Then he tried to lift it. The two legs on the side on which he was held fast to the floor. He tried the legs on the other side—tugged, tugged, tugged—then it yielded just sufficiently to show that on that side, at least, it was no longer attached to the floor.

"That's it, is it? Now I begin to see. It's the two legs on the other side which are fastened down. That being so, if we get enough leverage on this side we ought to force them loose."

Exerting all his strength he raised, inch by inch, the side of the table on which he was until there was a snapping sound, which took him unawares, and before he could relax his efforts the table went over.

"Lucky I didn't go over too," was his comment. "What's that sticking out of that leg? Those two legs were screwed down by means of plates which were hidden by matting. I've done their business; they've broken away. But that thing sticking out is a wire which is connected with the something I trod upon, and which runs up the center of the leg, as I thought. The question is, what happens when it gets to the top of the leg?"

As he stood, looking down at his handiwork, something caught his eye.

"That looks as if I had done more than force the table loose; I shouldn't wonder if the jar it got has caused it to give away its secret."

Replacing the table on its legs, he found that part of the woodwork on one side was loosened; a slight jerk induced it to come right away. A kind of little cupboard was disclosed, containing something which, peer at it as closely as he might, was beyond his comprehension.

"What is the thing? Apparatus of some kind, but of what kind? Is it an electrical machine, or some sort of signal? My first idea was that when you stepped upon that spring you sounded an alarm somewhere above which would at once inform the attentive Mr. Creed that he had a visitor below; but that doesn't look as if it were anything in the signaling way. What can it be? I believe—it looks—it might be—I've got it! It's a camera! A thing with which you can take snap-shots, on entirely novel lines. Any one crossing from that door to the table was photographed without his knowing it."

He picked up the piece of woodwork which had come away.

"Yes, here's the shutter—in this slab of wood. It instantly rises and falls when the spring is trodden on, and in a flash the trick's done. I won't say what a diabolical, but what an ingenious contrivance! Jerningham Creed was really a marvelous old gentleman. That of course is the film; can I get it loose? I've got it. How many exposures can there be? There seem to be yards and yards of it.

"Once upon a time I was bitten by the photographic craze myself. I was constantly libeling both my friends and enemies. I'll take care of this film—this is a handy cover which prevents the light getting at it until the proper moment—I used to be rather good at both developing and printing. If that spring worked properly, and the lens was good, and the film, it's possible that I may find myself the possessor of a little gallery of portraits for which the police might give something, and the originals—for their souls' sake, and to save their skins, and perhaps their necks—might give a great deal more."

As he stood up, with the roll of film in his hand, there came a knocking at the door; a furtive knocking, as if some one wished to make his presence audible while making the least amount of noise.

"Who may that be? A visitor for Messrs. Latraille, Olgano & Co., at this time of day—so long after the firm has ceased to exist?"

Martin Adair stood quite still. Presently the knocking came again, furtive as before. Then the flap meant for letters was pressed back; it was screened by a metal sort of hood, so that while letters could be inserted, no one outside could see into the room. Through the lifted flap there came the sound of whistling; some one without was softly whistling a few bars of a little tune.

"The visitor is a musician. Is that an air of his own composition, or is it a prearranged and familiar signal? Did Creed recognize the visitor when he heard that tune? My friend, whoever you are, you'll knock, you'll whistle in vain; you'll stay outside. The firm is dead."

CHAPTER XIII

OVER THEIR COFFEE

THE TWO men were seated in the lounge of the Colossus Hotel, having had an excellent dinner in the restaurant. Martin Adair was on one side of a tiny table; his host, John Harper, was on the other. They were having coffee. Presently Adair said:

"Your note, Harper, asking me to dine with you tonight came in the very nick of time. I wanted some one whom I could consult on certain rather delicate matters, and when I had your note I said to myself, 'This is just the man.'"

"How?"

The speaker was a spare, dark man, whose black hair, cut very short without any parting, gave him an oddly foreign appearance. "You don't know much about me. How do you know that I'm a man you can consult on delicate matters? I met you in Paris; we chummed up together, I've seen you two or three times since, and practically that's the whole of our acquaintance. How do you know what sort of a person I am?"

His voice was very soft and quiet; he scarcely moved his lips as he was speaking. The whole man conveyed the impression of immobility.

"I know more about you than you suppose. I've been making inquiries about you, Mr. Harper."

"You have? That's good. And you've learned?"

"I've learned for one thing that you're one of the largest dealers in precious stones in Europe, and one of the finest judges."

"Who told you that?"

"A gentleman in Hatton Garden. A Mr. Isaac Abraham."

"Isaac Abraham? Yes, I know Mr. Isaac Abraham. Is it about precious stones that you wish to consult me?"

"I am myself a pretty good critic of a man; and I think, Mr. Harper, you may be safely consulted on other matters besides precious stones. But it's with precious stones I'm going to begin. I have something here, and I want you to tell me what you think of it."

"Are you a dealer, Adair?"

"I am not; but it so happens that certain articles have come into my hands. I should like an expert opinion on their value."

"Expert opinions can always be got; why come to me?"

"Because of what Mr. Abraham told me and because of other reasons which I may touch on presently. I think you'll understand why I've come to you before I've done. Look at that."

Mr. Adair took a small leather case out of his waistcoat pocket, opened it and handed it across the table. Mr. Harper looked at it. Something happened to his face which suggested that what he saw surprised him; but the something was gone in an instant—his face was as expressionless as before. He was so long examining what Adair had handed him that that gentleman, as if impatient of his continued silence, asked a question, leaning over the table as he did so.

"What do you think of it?"

Mr. Harper was still silent for some seconds, then, looking up, he met the other's eyes—and still for a moment or two he said nothing. Then he observed so gently that it was almost like a whisper—

"Adair, I'm beginning to think that I ought to have made inquiries about you."

Adair smiled.

"You would not have learned very much."

"Is that so? All I can say is that I don't quite grasp the situation. You casually take a little box out of your pocket; you hand it to me—it contains one of the world's most famous diamonds, and you ask me what I think of it."

"It is a diamond?"

"It is a diamond? You don't mean to tell me—"

The speaker stopped, as if because of something he saw in the other's eyes. "You don't wish me to believe that you are serious when you ask if this is a diamond —this glorious stone which I'm holding between my finger and thumb? You're a little beyond me if you are serious."

"My knowledge of precious stones is only slight. I've never seen a diamond that size before, so I wondered if it really was one."

"This is becoming interesting." Mr. Harper sat a little forward in his chair, as if to convey by his movement how interested he was. "May I ask—we're in a confidential atmosphere—how this, which you didn't know to be a diamond, came into your—charge?"

"First of all tell me what it's worth."

"Worth? A thing like this is worth what it will fetch. There are men in this hotel who I dare say would give you a hundred thousand pounds for it tonight."

"Really? So much as that?"

"They'd give it you if you could submit its pedigree for their inspection; but you can't. This stone has got a history."

"You seem to recognize it; have you seen it before?"

"No, I have not; but I do not need to have seen a stone like this before to know it when I do see it. Do you mean to say you don't know the history of this stone?"

"I don't; I'll tell you what I do know about it presently—it really amounts to very little. If you know its history, unless you have special reasons to the contrary, perhaps you'll pass it on to me. I shall be very much obliged."

Mr. Harper laid the little leather case on the table beside his coffee-cup. He touched with his finger tip the gleaming crystal it contained. His soft tones could have been audible only to the man immediately in front of him. Mr. Adair smoked his cigar as he listened.

"This is the Kaufmann Diamond. It was found in Brazil at the beginning of the last century. It was sold to Kaufmann of Amsterdam—whence its name. He was one of the big dealers of his day. He gave twenty-five thousand pounds for it in its uncut state."

"Wasn't that a big price to pay for an uncut stone, even of this size?"

"But Kaufmann had a customer for it before he paid a penny. The Raja of Ahmednuggar, who had lately come into possession of the Rajaship, wanted something big in the way of diamonds to stick in his turban, and for other purposes. Kaufmann told him of this stone and he agreed to buy it. The exact sum he gave for it when cut is not known; but it is known that Kaufmann made a big fortune out of that single deal.

"It remained the property of the Rajas of Ahmednuggar until 1897; that was Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee year. All the world came to London to do her honor—and themselves honor. The Raja of Ahmednuggar thought that he would come, and he came; and he brought this stone with him. But he never took it away again. When he returned to Ahmednuggar he went without the Kaufmann Diamond."

"Why? Had he got rid of it in some way, or what had become of it?"

"It was stolen. I don't think any one knows quite when it was stolen, and no one knows how—except the thief or thieves. The Raja wore it in Westminster Abbey, and at Buckingham Palace, and at Windsor Castle, and at some of the big things in town; but when he was on the steamer on his homeward journey and wanted it for some function which was to take place on board, it couldn't be found. It never has been found since."

"Was a great fuss made about it at the time? I don't remember hearing it."

"There was no fuss. You understand I'm not pretending to tell you the secret history of the stealing of the Kaufmann Diamond; but whispers reached me—whispers do sometimes reach me—and it was whispered that a lady was mixed up with the business. It would have been awkward for the Raja if certain little incidents had got out into the daylight, so he put up with his loss and did his best to smile."

"I gather that nothing was made public. Then, if that is so, how can you be sure that the stone ever was stolen—unless you had special information?"

"I had special information—a good many of us had. A word went round that the stone had gone, and that we were to keep our eyes open. It was intimated that if it was returned the sorrowing owner would pay a good round sum and ask no questions. I've asked myself a good many times, Mr. Adair, what became of that stone. Jewels—famous jewels—have vanished more than once; vanished as completely as if they had never been—so completely that nothing has been heard or seen of them since. A good many dealers have asked questions of themselves and others. It's like hidden treasure that people go to hunt for in the Spanish Main. If a man could only get an inkling of an idea where it might be worth while to look for any of these missing jewels he'd start on the quest tomorrow.

"It's a world of coincidences, Adair; it's funny that you should come to me with this." Once more the tip of his finger rested on the glowing stone. "It's a special problem I set myself to solve some years ago—what became of the Kaufmann Diamond. Can you give me the solution?"

"I FANCY, Harper, you know a good many things about men and affairs of which you don't care to speak. Do you know anything about me?"

"I don't; not a single thing. I met you in Paris, I rather liked you; partly, perhaps, because I could see with half an eye that as regards class you and I were under different headings.

"I took you for a man who was born in the purple—one of our bloated aristocrats. My father kept a sort of marine store; I fancy he married my mother because it was cheaper to keep a wife than a servant—she wanted no regular wages. I began my education in the Penton Road boarding school and there I finished it. I fancy you went to Eton, and the university; and I dare say that you could give me an intimate description of the interiors of half the great houses in England. You remember that in Paris I asked you no questions."

"I noticed it; not even my name."

"Because I had learned from the hotel register that it was Adair. I know something about the great families of England, but I don't think there's an Adair among them; so, as you say, I didn't even ask your name. And I've made no inquiries about you from that hour to this. But when you take out of your waistcoat pocket a little leather box containing the Kaufmann Diamond, and hand it over to me and ask me what I think of it, the matter assumes a different complexion."

"You think the time has come to make inquiries?"

"Well—if a man handed you the title deeds of the Bank of England you'd feel a sort of mild curiosity as to how he became possessed of them."

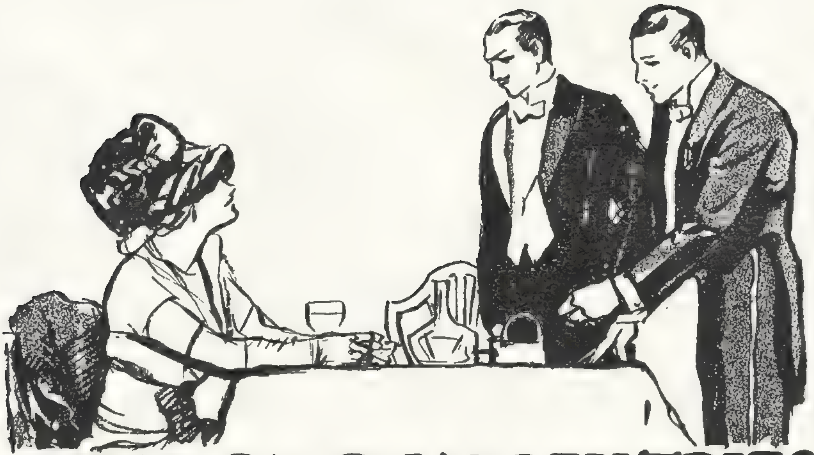
"I'm quite prepared to tell you how I became possessed of that. Indeed, that's one of the reasons why I was so anxious to see you—I wanted to tell you, and to consult you."

"I can assure you, Mr. Adair, that I'm very willing to listen and to be consulted. I've a nose for this kind of thing, and I rather fancy that I'm going to hear what one of the newspapers calls a queer story."

"I think you are; and one of the queerest parts of it is that I have not myself yet got to the bottom of its queerness." The speaker glanced round the lounge. "Don't you think this rather a public place? We have it pretty well to ourselves, but still——"

"You're right; there are waiters." Mr. Harper rose from his chair. "Put that lump of crystal back into your pocket, Mr. Adair. There's at least one other man in this building who would recognize it if he had the chance. Perhaps we'd both of us rather he didn't. I've a private sitting-room upstairs; if you'll honor me with your company we'll talk there of some of the strange things in heaven and earth which are undreamed of in some men's philosophy."

The last half of *"A Man With Nine Lives"* will appear in the next (January) Issue.



COME-ON CHARLEY TRIES OUT WALL STREET

by

THOMAS ADDISON

SCORE $167,000

THE fraternity of confidence-men was hurt in its self-esteem. It was mortified and humiliated by the fiascos which had attended the best efforts of its star members to "hang the bell" on Come-On Charley. It was more than hurt: it was indignant to the point of holding a mass-meeting in Carnegie Hall, had the step been feasible, to protest against the invasion of their established rights by a plain New Jersey boob.

"Why," the fraternity asked itself, "is this guy called Come-On Charley when he doesn't come on? He stops too soon. Who hands him his cue to crab the business of raking in the coin?"

It was this conundrum that got the goat—if we may so phrase it—of the embittered "con" men. Mr. Carter had acquired wealth and fame at their expense. The "Blue Flea" episode had raised a shout from one end of Broadway to the other; a self-respecting bunco-steerer couldn't walk that Primrose Path and hold his head up.

And to make a bad matter worse, the newspapers exaggerated Come-On Charley's winnings shockingly. They credited him with a quarter of a million dollars wrested from the industrious brotherhood, when the latter knew it wasn't half that much.

Charley could have told them to a penny what it was. His bank-book showed a balance of $167,000 in round numbers. But ten thousand of this was his "starter," received from Samuel Drew, attorney-at-law, and fifty thousand was the reward Morton

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Editorial Note—*Samuel Drew*, a New York lawyer with a $10,000 bequest for Charles Arthur Carter ("Come-On Charley"), a clerk in a small New Jersey town, yields to a whimsical impulse (and other things), and tells *Come-On* this money is only the advance payment on a $2,000,000 bequest to come to him if he makes the $10,000 grow to $1,000,000. (Wants to see what a man can accomplish with just the *reputation* of having $2,000,000.) *Come-On* accepts the news placidly, moves to the Hotel Rirebien in New York, and becomes target for all the "con." men. Good-natured, easily approachable, yet somehow he always emerges winner instead of loser. Not such a fool as he seems, quick to learn from experience, doing very little talking, he adds a little each time to his original $10,000. *Percival Teeters*, his light-headed and slangy secretary; *Ball*, his newspaper friend; *Joe Link*, his boxing-instructor; and *Drew*, the lawyer, generally figure in his adventures.

Butler, the railroad baron, had paid him in the affair of the oriental ruby.

Subtract this sixty thousand dollars, then add five thousand for a high-powered touring car, and five more for lavish living in the past half-year, and you have a total of $117,000 which Mr. Carter had smilingly lifted from the pockets of the flower of New York's flock of sheep-shearers.

The status quo of the persuasive gentry was outrageous. It was unendurable. Reprisals were in order—something to restore a shattered prestige. The nature of them, however, called for elaborate consideration, and meanwhile Mr. Carter went blithely on his way.

Two million dollars were coming to him, according to Mr. Drew, when his starter should have grown sufficiently, and in the interim he wasn't exactly running into debt. The world looked fairly good to him as he and his secretary, Mr. Percival Teeters, sometimes known as "Merciful Skeeters," went down to dinner in the Hotel Rirebien one brisk November evening. It was Monday the 14th, by the way—the beginning of a week which made copy for the newspapers and pulp of the effete argument that there's no such thing as luck.

* * *

JEAN, the head waiter, conducted them to their table over in a corner by the window. This table was sacred to Mr. Carter's use, for Jean was that young gentleman's slave, bound to him in chains of golden tips.

"Say, Come-On, she's here again!" whispered Mr. Teeters as they followed Jean across the room.

"Stale stuff," Charley answered. "Saw her first."

"She's the goods, all right," asserted Mr. Teeters. "They didn't send her here by parcel-post. She flew down from a star."

"Sure," said Charley. "Venus."

He grinned at Mr. Teeters who was feeling of his tie to make certain of its proper angle.

They were inducted into their seats by Jean with solemn ceremony. When they had given their orders to the waiter they glanced at the table abreast of theirs.

A very pretty woman sat facing them. She was young and handsomely gowned, and she was alone. She had occupied the same seat the night before. Jean could tell why: she had picked it out and paid for it.

This charming creature raised her eyes as Mr. Carter and his secretary looked at her. They were friendly eyes. One more skilled in women than either Mr. Carter or Mr. Teeters would have called them, also, competent eyes—eyes that knew their business and went about it. But the two young men saw only the friendliness in them and were elated by it.

She had not looked at them in that way the previous evening. She had kept her eyes on her plate and allowed them to feast upon her comeliness. But twenty-four hours make a difference. It engenders a neighborly feeling to dine two evenings in succession at companion tables. One may be permitted to show it—discreetly, of course.

"Gee!" said Charley under his breath to Mr. Teeters. "Wish I knew her. Wonder who she is?"

"Somebody's darling with a return-ticket pinned in her sash," commented Mr. Teeters sagely. "They marry that kind the day they're born. Don't take any chances."

"No ring on her finger," demurred Charley.

Mr. Teeters cackled scornfully.

"Huh! Some churches don't wear a steeple, but they're churches all the same."

They glanced at the lady again, and again her eyes met theirs. The flash of a humming-bird's wing is not more evanescent than the smile that curved her ripe red lips—but she smiled! That was the point.

Mr. Teeters sat up in his chair and straightened his dinner-jacket. He was glad he had put on the new crêpe dress-shirt which had, in his own words, "set him back six bucks." It became him to a miracle, his partial glass had told him, and now he was making a killing with it. A deuced good investment, if anybody asked!

"Maybe she's out at grass," he sibilantly suggested to Mr. Carter. "That's the reason she ain't wearing a license-tag."

Charley failed to catch him.

"What?" he queried.

"Divorced," prompted Mr. Teeters. "Hole in the net and hubby swam out. She's feeding on the alimony right now. Betcher."

Charley surveyed his secretary quizzically.

"How will you find out?" he demanded.

"Ask Jeen," rejoined Mr. Teeters, who had a way of anglicizing names to suit his fancy. "He knows more about people than a horse about oats."

The head waiter was strolling by and Mr. Teeters signaled to him.

"Say, Jeen," he questioned guardedly, when the man came up. "Who is Little Dotty Dimples over there? Know her?"

Jean put his hand to his mouth and leaned toward them confidentially. The lady at the other table noted the movement and smiled to herself.

"Of a verity, yes," said Jean smoothly. "She is a Miss Irene King, from Chicago. A buyer for Harshall, Beale & Company. *Très chic*, eh?"

He lifted his shoulders and spread out his hands in a gesture that could be interpreted as his audience pleased. The information he had imparted had been communicated to him by Miss King herself in one of those little bursts of confidence head waiters seem to inspire in guileless guests.

"You lose, Skeeters," grinned Charley.

"Oh, Chicago!" retorted Mr. Teeters. "I was betting on people who live in the United States."

It chanced that Charley looked in Miss Irene King's direction as he taunted his discomfited secretary. There was something infectious in the boy's grin—something artless and disarming that warmed one to him willy-nilly. The young woman smiled at him now quite openly; and she reinforced it with a little good-humored nod that, to Charley, seemed to establish an understanding between them. It made him flush with pleasure.

Mr. Teeters missed this bit of by-play, and he was astonished when Charley said to the head waiter eagerly:

"Jean, want to send the lady a glass of wine. Ask her."

The man imperturbably moved off on his errand.

"Gollamighty, Come-On!" ejaculated Mr. Teeters. "You ought to take a nerve cure. It'll get you if you let it run on like this."

"Wait!" was Charley's sole reply to the playful outbreak.

"Wait for what?" Mr. Teeters begged to be informed.

"The wine," Charley answered him impassively.

Jean came back.

"The lady is charmed, sir," he recited with the suave importance of his kind. "She begs me to say that she takes the New York papers at home and has read about you both. She knew you by your pictures."

"Ha!" exclaimed Mr. Teeters.

"She says," went on the head waiter, "she will be delighted if you could find it to your pleasure to have your dinner served at her table."

Charley's hazel eyes widened. This was something totally unlooked-for and, by reason of it, captivating. He was clean-minded and straightforward in his ways, and the oddity of the invitation did not occur to him. It was one good fellow meeting another, and the more cause for self-gratulation that the other fellow happened to be a most engaging girl.

"By George!" he cried. "I guess yes! Come on, Percy!"

He sprang up, and with a beaming face crossed over to the other table.

II

MR. TEETERS followed his chief, though not with marked alacrity. He was a little startled by the rapid sequence of events and, also, he was a trifle piqued at himself. Women were his peculiar province. They held no mystery for such as he. They were as transparent to his searching eye as the glass cover to a dish of prunes. And here he had sat by like a tame toad under a bilberry-bush and let Charley beat him to the gate! It put him back a peg in his own estimation—which is the cruelest sort of setback a man can suffer.

However, as he progressed with his dinner Mr. Teeters recovered his peace of mind. Miss King was a delightful companion. She had a way of deferring to one's opinion that was as heady as the wine they drank. It made a chap realize that he cut some figure in affairs, and gave him a new respect for the mother that bore him. In fine, it made a fellow appreciate his worth at its proper value.

"Do you know," said the lady, after they had sounded the shallow well of small-talk that strangers draw from in the first stages of acquaintance, "do you know I am tempted to tell you a secret, you two men of the world. I want your advice."

"Fine!" applauded Charley. "Percy's long suit."

Mr. Teeters assumed what he imagined was a *blasé* air, and remarked:

"Shop's open for business. If it's on the shelf I'll hand it down to you."

Miss King laughed, then hesitated prettily before going on.

"I don't know what you will think of me," she said at length, "but—well, I want to take a—what do you call it—a flier—yes, that's it! I want to take a flier in Wall Street."

"Oh, Wall Street!" returned Mr. Teeters vaguely. He was out of his depth at the start.

"Hope you won't miss the money," hinted Charley slyly.

"But I have a tip!" Miss King avowed. "Boston Copper. It is going up, they say; or perhaps it's going down; I can't seem to remember. Anyway they are going to do something to it and I thought I'd take a chance."

Mr. Teeters shook his head wisely.

"Better not," he cautioned. "Put it in a turkey raffle. Thanksgiving's coming."

Miss King arched her brows at him.

"You're so quaint!" she laughed. "But seriously, I want to make use of my tip. Only, you see, I don't know just how to do it."

"Neither do we," admitted Charley frankly. "Might as well own up, Skeeters."

Mr. Teeters wiggled his mustache and smiled painfully. He hated to acknowledge ignorance.

"You got me up a tree," he conceded. "I'm climbing down."

"Dear me, how funny!" trilled the young woman. "We're all in the woods together. I could ask Gitt & Gott, I suppose. They are the brokers recommended to me—a very reliable house. But I dislike the idea of going down there; it—it is so public! And besides I'm frightfully busy during the day."

She sipped her wine with a tiny puzzled frown that became her mightily.

"By George! Say!" cried Charley, responding to the frown. "We'll see Gitt & Gott for you. In the morning. Find out what to do."

"Oh, would you?" Miss King's voice fluttered bewitchingly. "Wouldn't it be too much trouble?"

Charley grinned across the table at his secretary.

"Hear that, Skeeters? 'Trouble!' "

Mr. Teeters, finding himself unbelittled by his confession, replied with spirit.

"How do you spell it?" he requested earnestly. "Don't know what it means."

"You're too delightful for anything!" gurgled Miss King. "Both of you! I do so want to make a little money out of Boston Copper!"

"What's the bet?" inquired Mr. Teeters indulgently. "A ten-spot?"

"Ten dollars?" The lady looked amazed. "Why—I'm going to put a thousand dollars in it!"

Mr. Teeters gasped, and goggled at her.

"Merry Moses! Going to buy the junk and take it home with you?"

Miss King laughed again.

"I'm going to margin it—I think that's what they call it. You put up so much money and wait a while—only a day sometimes—then they pay you what it wins."

"Sounds simple," said Charley.

"Oh, it's awfully simple!" agreed Miss King gaily. "Gitt & Gott will explain it to you. I will give you a check for them after dinner — a New York draft. Could you meet me in the parlor, at half-past eight?"

"Could we? We'll look like we were growing there," Mr. Teeters assured her gallantly.

There came an interruption. Some one in passing paused and tapped Charley on the shoulder.

"Hello, sport! Hello, Merciful!" saluted this person airily. "What are they quoting blue fleas at to-day?"

Charley looked up with a grin. A slim young fellow with clear blue eyes grinned back at him. It was Mr. Theodore Ball, sporting editor of the *Evening Scream.* The baseball magnates were assembled in annual conference at the Rirebien, and Mr. Ball had been dining with one of them.

"Teddy!" Charley's voice rang with pleased surprise. "By George! Luck! Sit down. Miss King, Teddy Ball. Knows everything."

The lady acknowledged the introduction without signal enthusiasm. Mr. Ball's eyes were bold and his manner was assured. A pretty woman likes to be approached with deference.

"What do you want to know, little boy?" queried the sporting editor easily. "They came to me when they wrote the cyclopedia."

"Got a tip. Wall Street. Boston Copper," Charley told him. "Don't know what to do with it."

"Let it alone," promptly counseled Mr. Ball.

He shot a keen glance at Miss King. It may have carried with it a ray of suspicion which she felt, for she said to him coldly:

"It is my tip. I don't understand the ways of the stock-market and was asking Mr. Carter to enlighten me."

"Oh!" said Mr. Ball.

"She's got a thousand beans to spill," interjected Mr. Teeters to clarify the situation.

"Oh!" said Mr. Ball again.

"What does she do with the wampum, Teddy?" persisted Mr. Teeters.

"Hand it to a broker and begin to save again," returned the *Scream* man. "I had a tip once and didn't get over it for a year."

"How unfortunate!" condoled Miss King. There was a touch of irony in her tone. "You wouldn't advise me, then, to try my luck—not with a perfectly good tip? From the inside?"

"They're all from the inside," Mr. Ball rejoined with a good-natured laugh. "But you want to know what to do with your thousand? All right. It will margin a hundred shares of Copper ten points. If you buy you'll make a hundred dollars for every point Copper goes up. If you sell you'll make the same for every point it drops. It's only a little matter of getting in and getting out. If you guess right you can't go wrong. Easy as counting the bristles in a brush."

"Thank you so much!" said the lady with a mocking smile. "Nothing could be clearer." She rose as she spoke. "I must be going now. No, please don't!" as the young men stood up. "I would much rather you finished your cigars in comfort."

For a moment she let her eyes linger on Charley's. They held a question. "Half past eight?" they said, and Charley, reading the question but lacking skill in wireless telegraphy, semaphored the answer. It was a wink, honest and hearty as himself.

Miss King turned, a little hastily, and swept down the room. Mr. Ball watched her go, and then he slewed around in his chair to Mr. Carter.

"Where did you meet mother?" he inquired pleasantly.

" 'Mother?' Oh, I say, Teddy!" protested Mr. Carter.

"Why, you kid," hooted his friend, "she's six laps ahead of you if she's a minute. Thirty in the shade! What's the game anyway?"

Charley told him how they had met, and the program for the morning.

"Look here," said Mr. Ball, when he had the story, "you keep away from Wall Street, Mr. Come-On Charley! Don't mix up with it. These con men you've been playing horse with are baby dolls when you stack 'em up against that bunch in Slaughter Alley. They'll take your little trot covers off and send you home barefoot. It's a gamble if they'd let you off that easy—you'd make good soap fat if they boiled you down."

"Take a twist around yourself, Teddy!" admonished Mr. Teeters. "You're coming loose. We ain't going for ourselves; we're going for a friend."

"Sure," said Charley. "Information."

Mr. Ball studied the two through a haze of smoke. Then he asked—

"Ever see a tout?"

"What does it look like?" Mr. Teeters wanted to know.

"Sometimes," said Mr. Ball slowly, "it looks like one thing and sometimes like another. And it bites! Hello! There's Mack of the Nationals hailing me from the door. See you later."

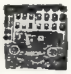
He went away and left them to their reflections.

"Wonder what he meant?" pondered Charley.

"Huh!" sniffed Mr. Teeters. "His wheels want winding up. He thinks they're going when the works have stopped."

With this he pushed back his chair and arose. Charley did the same. Then, as with one accord, they sauntered off in the direction of the parlor-stairs.

III



MR. CARTER'S flaming-red touring-car stood before Gitt & Gott's margin-shop down where the cypress grows. It was half-past ten on Tuesday. Mr. Carter and Mr. Teeters were inside in Mr. Gott's private office. Mr. Gitt was not about, but Mr. Gott had received them, when he learned their names, as if they were nearer to him than his relatives—a statement which, perhaps, the esteemed dear reader will know how to appraise.

Mr. Gott was a little lean man of a most benevolent aspect, due principally to a set of antique and luxuriant Burnsides which he kept carefully trimmed and combed. These whiskers were an asset of the firm, which did not appear in its balance-sheet.

The broker had gone to some pains to explain the technicalities—or shall we call it technique—of stock-trading to his visitors. When he was through it was as clear to Mr. Teeters as the fourth dimension, or the fifth problem in Euclid.

Charley was but little better off. The one lucid impression that remained with both—and which Mr. Gott saw to—was that until now they had criminally neglected to enrich themselves at the expense of a lot of prominent but imbecile financiers.

"Great game!" said Charley. "But what about Copper? Better buy? Miss King left it to me."

He produced the lady's draft and passed it over to the broker. Mr. Gott centered a fatherly smile on him, and made a deprecating gesture with his well-manicured hands.

"Now you have asked a question, my dear Mr. Carter," he purred, "that I really ought not to answer. We can not undertake to advise our customers. It wouldn't do, you know. Our business is simply to execute orders and take our modest commission—one-eighth of one per cent. I may say this, though. Copper is active—quite so—and it looks to me—understand, I am speaking for myself, not the house—it looks to me a good buy."

"All right," decided Charley. "Buy."

Mr. Gott pushed a button. A dapper young man came in from the outer office, and to this spruce person the broker confided Miss King's check.

"One hundred Boston Copper, Albert, at the market. Buy," instructed Mr. Gott. "What is it now?"

"Ninety-seven and a half."

"Hum," mused Mr. Gott. "Opened at 96⅞. Looks well for a quick turn. Sell at par, Albert."

Albert hurried out. Mr. Gott lavished his paternal smile on Charley.

"Ladies like quick profits," he observed with a humorous shrug. "We'll get the stock around 98. If it continues to climb, your friend will make, say, a hundred and seventy-five dollars on the turn. A seventeen and a half per cent. dividend on a thousand-dollar investment—and possibly in the next half-hour. Not bad, eh, for car-fares and matinées?"

"Come-On!" cried Mr. Teeters. "Get aboard! You're losing money!"

Mr. Gott coughed gently behind his hand. Not for worlds would he have uttered a word just then. The equilibrium was too nice.

"Call that chap," said Charley, and taking out his check-book he filled in a blank.

Albert appeared promptly. Time is a factor in a margin-shop.

"Got it at 98¼," he announced without waiting to be questioned.

"Buy another chunk," requested Charley.

He handed his check to Mr. Gott. That gentleman started as he glanced at it, but covered his surprise with a cough; the check was for ten thousand dollars. He spoke out sharply:

"Ten hundred Boston Copper, Albert. Sell at——?" He looked at Charley.

"Let her run a while," replied Mr. Carter carelessly. "No hurry."

Albert vanished. Mr. Gott turned to the telephone and called up the bank.

"Matter of form," he apologized. "My partner, you know. For myself——"

The bank answered, and presently Mr. Gott hung up the receiver with a satisfied air.

"Good as gold. I knew it, of course, but Gitt is fussy about these things. Suppose we take a look at the board—see how things are going?"

"Bully," said Charley. "New game. Fun."

They went out into the boardroom. Tickers were buzzing and telegraph-keys clicking merrily. There was a big blackboard at one end of the room with a narrow gangway traversing the bottom of it. A youth in shirtsleeves was running to and fro on this track chalking down figures sung out to him by a man at one of the tickers.

Before the board were rows of chairs. Most of them were occupied. After a long period of depression the market had begun to pick up; it "showed tone," as the patter goes. It was rumored that the President's forthcoming message to the Congress would declare a truce in the war with the Big Interests; they had been chastised sufficiently for the present.

And the small fry in Wall Street live on rumors. They are Bulls or Bears according to the point the rumor blows from—jumping in and out of the market with the alacrity of acrobats. It all helps to keep the big fellows' limousines in gasoline.

The traders looked around when Mr. Gott came in with his young friends. It meant something when "Old Whiskers" played the part of cicerone. They pricked up their ears, and Mr. Gott talked for their benefit without appearing to do so. A word well placed might make business at the desk.

"Where's Boston Copper?" asked Charley when his guide had finished explaining the symbols on the board.

Mr. Gott pointed to a column toward the left.

"There. See the letters BC at the head?"

At this moment, as it happened, the man at the ticker called out—

"Boston Copper, 99."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Gott. "You bought at 98½. Five hundred dollars in ten minutes. Not bad at all. Your—er—tip seems to have come pretty straight."

"Merry Moses!" chirruped Mr. Teeters. "Fifty bones a minute! What's the use of working?"

"Soft!" said Charley.

One of the traders got up and slid over to the desk.

"Boston Copper 99⅛—¼—½," droned the ticker man.

Two of the traders got up and followed the first. Something was doing in Copper. This round-faced boy had a tip, sure enough.

"American Can, 31½; U. S. Steel, 64⅜; Erie, 46," proclaimed the man. Then he added—Boston Copper, 100⅛—½—¾."

There was a stampede now to the desk.

"Twenty-two hundred and fifty dollars to your credit, Mr. Carter," the broker purred. "And your friend has made her pin money. We sold for her at par, you know —100."

Mr. Teeters was trembling with excitement.

"Say, Gott!" he piped, dispensing with the clogging formality of a title. "You barked too soon. Can't you keep the wheel spinning for her? Look at that!"

The youth at the blackboard was marking Copper up to 101. Mr. Gott smiled on the agitated secretary.

"It is better to play safe with the ladies, my boy," he said to him soothingly. "This may be only a flurry. The stock may sag back again. Come into the office. We will have Miss King's statement and check made out. And perhaps, Mr. Carter, you had better take your profit."

Mr. Gott was anxious to send his new client away a winner. First-time winners come again; losers sometimes stay out altogether.

"Guess not," Charley answered him. "Make or break. Let her go."

"You mean, of course, until the close today?" suggested the broker.

"Right," said Charley. "Till the cows come home."

Mr. Gott slowly wagged his head from side to side.

"You can't tell what will happen——"

"Sure," broke in Charley cheerfully. "That's the fun of it."

When, a little later, they came out to their car Charley carried in his pocket a check for Miss King in the sum of $1,148.61. Mr. Gott had subtracted—and explained it to them carefully—$24.75 for commissions, buying and selling, and $1.64 interest charge for carrying the account. Charley also brought away with him a stock list on which Mr. Gott had kindly marked for reference a few promising industrial and railroad securities.

AS MR. CARTER and his secretary emerged from the margin-shop they came face to face with Mr. Samuel Drew. That portly advocate stopped short. Surprise bordering on consternation settled on his florid visage.

"Hello! What does this mean?" he rapped out.

Charley grinned at him.

"Seeing New York. Tickling the tiger."

Mr. Drew frowned but made no direct reply. Instead he asked—

"Where are you going now?"

"Up-town," Charley told him.

"Got a bag of Copper bullets for a lady," appended Mr. Teeters waggishly.

"I'll ride with you," decreed the lawyer.

He had no smile for Mr. Teeters's pleasantry. His frown deepened, rather, and he stepped into the red car and sat down heavily—with the air of one whose mind is weighted with grave concern. He had begun to feel pride in Come-On Charley's success.

It relieved him to know that the millionaire he had created out of nothing in a moment's whimsy had got together a really pretty fortune. When the inevitable end to his prank should come, this fact would tell in his favor and ease the friction. It would pass the thing off into the realm of good jokes, to be recounted to applause at many a gleeful dinner-table. Besides, he liked the boy—confound him! And here he was pottering around among the petty thieves in Wall Street!

Mr. Drew was stirred from his usual poise; the quiet irony of speech on which he plumed himself deserted him.

"Who is this woman you speak of?" he demanded bluntly as they drove off. "Where did you come across her — and how?"

Charley told the story.

"So you played commissioner for a pretty fool who wants to lose her money?" grumbled Mr. Drew.

"But she's won!" expostulated Mr. Teeters. "We're toting home the bacon to her now."

"Ugh!" The lawyer shrugged his impatience. "That's her misfortune."

"And Come-On's won!" persisted Mr. Teeters resentfully. "He's twenty-five hundred to the good—and it's going up!"

"*What?*" Mr. Drew shifted around on the seat and stared at Charley. This was calamitous news.

"Took a shot," admitted Mr. Carter tranquilly. "Thousand shares. Boston Copper."

Mr. Drew groaned.

"Oh, Lord! He's hooked! They'll land him for his pile!" He turned savagely on Charley. "So—you're twenty-five hundred to the good, are you?" he sneered. "And it's going up? Take off your hat and let me see your ears. They must be going up too—Midas ears—long and pointed. In short, my good young friend—ass's ears!"

Charley felt of his ears with every appearance of solicitude.

"Seem the same," he asserted soberly. "And hear the same. Go on."

"Thanks," retorted the attorney. "It is exactly what I intend to do. You're to the good, you say, in this deal you've tumbled into. But it's not cash. It's paper profit. It wouldn't buy you a plate of hash if you were starving. You've bucked up at last against a game, my boy, that will smash you like a gnat under a hammer. You may pull off a play or two, but in the end it will leave you flat—without a dime to pay the grave-digger. Cut it out, Charley. Now!"

Mr. Teeters chafed under this advice to his chief. He wiggled his mustache distressfully.

"But he's picked a winner! It's going up!" he contended.

Mr. Drew fixed him with a baleful glare.

"He's picked a winner!" he mimicked. "Oh, he has? Let me hand you a hard, cold fact, Mr. Merciful Skeeters—right off the ice: if you dumped all the stocks On 'Change into a bag and shut your eyes and pulled out one you'd stand a better chance to make a killing than if you used that bit of bric-à-brac you've got screwed on to you between the shoulders."

Mr. Teeters hastily retired into himself to digest this piece of information. Mr. Carter also appeared to ponder it. Indeed, he seemed to be impressed by it. Noting this, Mr. Drew resorted to diplomacy.

"Don't force your luck, Charley," he entreated. "You've had a lot of it. Let well enough alone. If you drop your pile, what then—eh—what then?"

"Have to make a touch," responded Charley staidly. "Uncle Bill's two million."

Mr. Drew was seized with a sudden spasm of coughing. Charley regarded him with inscrutable eyes until it passed.

"Your starter!" sputtered the crimson-faced solicitor. "You forget that. You've got to make it grow."

"How much?" Charley asked.

Mr. Drew coughed again.

"Oh, to a million," he answered irritably. "And here you are dabbling in stocks! I hope to heaven the bottom will drop out of this infernal Copper. It might wake you up."

"Gee!" grinned Charley. "Cheerful friend. Bet I win. Bet a hundred even."

"Oh, hang it, what's the use!" shouted the exasperated man. "Here! Stop this car! I'll have a fit if I keep on. Stop it, I say!"

The driver swerved up to the curb and Mr. Drew stepped down.

"Come around tonight," Charley invited him, and still grinning. "Dinner. Celebrate."

"You confounded jackanapes, I'll do just that thing!" fumed the lawyer, shaking his fist at him. "And I hope I'll find you sitting in sackcloth and ashes sniveling over the wine!"

IV

MR. DREW was hobnobbing with Mr. Teddy Ball of the *Evening Scream*. They were in Mr. Carter's sitting-room, and the hour was eight o'clock of a Monday evening. It was the Monday following that on which this truthful tale began.

Mr. Carter and his secretary were at dinner and his friends were waiting for him. They had the run of his rooms, as had any one with a passport to Mr. Carter's confidence.

The lawyer and the newspaper man had come to know each other well in the past week. They were expecting Mr. Joseph Link, one time middleweight champion of the fistic arena, to join them. Mr. Link had not missed a night in Charley's rooms since Wednesday. Neither had Mr. Drew nor Mr. Ball. They were drawn there by the irresistible magnet of an overwhelming curiosity, and on Mr. Ball's part by the further drag of an insatiable thirst for "copy."

A stock-ticker in the corner was one of the poles of this magnet, and Charley himself was the other. Between the two there had been the dickens to pay since the day Boston Copper closed at 107½ and then tobogganed down to 98, where it still remained, or thereabouts, as if a nail had been driven through it.

Charley had cleaned up on that deal nine thousand dollars, less a trifle of two hundred and seventy odd dollars, commission and interest, retained by the fatherly Mr. Gott. The next day the ticker was installed in his apartments and things began to happen. The newspapers shrieked the news abroad, and soon they were calling him "Cash-In Charley" instead of "Come-On."

Miss King, it should be mentioned, departed from the Rirebien when she received her check from Gitt & Gott. She told Charley she had been invited to stay with friends, but gave him no address. She would, she had said, send it to him later if by any happy chance she should get another tip.

So, tipless and alone, Charley ran amuck in Wall Street. The market was strong and he plunged into it like a bucking bronco. Rumor had it that he played a system. He dealt in five-thousand-share lots at first, and he picked only one security a day, closing it out with the market. Some he bought and some he sold; it didn't seem to make any difference. Luck walked with a protecting arm around him and slept with him overnight.

In three days he kicked loose from a like number of securities $95,000, and what is more, brought it home with him. On Saturday, a short day, he pulled down $20,000. On this present day—Monday—he had raised his limit to ten thousand shares, and he gathered in $70,000. He was playing on velvet and was to the good something like $188,000 of Wall Street money.

As they sat companionably together Mr. Drew and Mr. Ball were casting back over these events.

"I can't understand it," complained the first. "It has got on my nerves. I'm losing flesh over it. How can a mere boy who doesn't know a debenture bond from an Irish dividend size up the market? It's uncanny, Ball, I tell you!"

Mr. Ball pulled fretfully on the fat cigar Mr. Drew had passed to him and observed:

"He's got my nanny all right. There's a corking story lying around these premises somewhere and I can't put my hand on it. I crabbed the job from Miller—he's our financial man—and he's getting sore because I don't clean up. But if Charley won't talk to me, he won't to Miller; and as for that wire-drawn skeleton, Teeters, he wouldn't know the house was afire till it singed his whiskers."

"It can't go on," declared the lawyer. "It's bound to get him. It always does. I've begged him to get out and salt his profits, but he only——"

"Grins!" supplied Mr. Ball. "I know—may the devil take him! I'd like some one to tell me how he picked out C. D. & Q. to win today. The White House spiel boosted things, of course, but that stock, Miller says, hasn't budged two points either way since the late J. P. pumped it full of Croton juice. And look at Richmond Rails last Friday: you'd have thought somebody kicked it, the way it jumped!"

"He went short on Panama Gas," Mr. Drew reminded him.

"Sure! And some one stuck a pin in it and let it out."

"Find the girl. Maybe she can tell how he does it."

It was Mr. Link who spoke. He had stepped in quietly and was contemplating the pair with earnest eyes.

"Bosh!" flung back the *Scream* man at

him rudely. "She don't know anything. She played her hand and lit out."

"Good luck go with her!" invoked Mr. Link devoutly. "Faith, she played it dummed well. I'm looking for a capful myself of all this small change she started coming."

"Oh, Lord!" wailed the lawyer. "He's hooked too!"

Mr. Ball was staring at the box-fighter curiously.

"What's the idea, Joseph?" he inquired.

Mr. Link sat down and crossed his legs with the deliberation that characterized his unprofessional movements.

"When they're cutting melons I like to be around," he stated. "I've got the price of a small slice in my pocket."

"Oho!" cried Mr. Ball. "A pool! That's the bee in your bonnet!"

"It is," acknowledged Mr. Link with gravity. "And the mate to it is in yours, me laddy-buck. I can hear it buzzing."

MR. BALL'S reply was arrested by the entrance of Mr. Carter and his secretary. Mr. Carter evinced unusual pleasure at seeing the reporter.

"Good boy, Teddy!" he exclaimed. "Was thinking of you. Want you to write an ad for me. All the morning papers."

"What's up?" Mr. Drew asked. "Going to tip the public off?"

He tried to make his tone cuttingly sarcastic, but failed. He would not confess it, but the boy's phenomenal luck, or whatever it should be called, had affected him—infected is perhaps the better word.

"He wants to advertise for 'mother,'" put in Mr. Teeters with a leer at Mr. Ball. "Home is not the same since mother went away."

"Drop it!" commanded Charley. "Say something like this, Teddy: Boston Copper lady. Dined at Rirebien, Monday 14th. Want to see her. Her advantage. Charley."

Mr. Link looked wise and nodded at Mr. Drew. Mr. Ball pretended not to see it, yet he refrained from putting into words a question his lips had framed; there was that in the set of Mr. Carter's mouth which made him class it as an extra-hazardous risk. In lieu of it he said:

"I get you, Charles. I'll make a classic of an ad. She'll come like the swallows homeward fly. Say," he added hurriedly, "Joe here wants to dip his beak in your porridge."

"Huh! He won't die alone. There's a million like him," commented Mr. Teeters.

"Lay down, ye spalpeen—roll over and play dead!" growled the ex-champion. "The little monkey-man from the *Scream* is right, Charley, me lad. I've a thousand I want you to invest for me. I need the money."

"He needs a commission *de lunatico inquirendo*," amended Mr. Drew. "Somebody ought to tell his friends about him."

"Risky, Joe," objected Charley. "Luck. May change tomorrow."

"Luck, d'ye call it!" scoffed Mr. Link. "All right. Hand me a sample and I'll eat it. Am I on?"

"Sure," agreed Charley. "Game old sport. Hope we win."

"I've got five hundred," drawled Mr. Ball, endeavoring to appear unconcerned. "I was going to buy a diamond, but——"

"Bless the saints, I called him!" guffawed the middleweight. "I saw it in his eye!"

"Anybody else?" queried Charley. He looked at Mr. Drew and grinned. "Lend you a thousand," he offered.

The lawyer's face grew purple with confusion. He was stampeded and he knew it. He had felt himself going from the first. To tell the plain truth, he was itching to get his finger in the pie, and had been for several days. To cover his surrender he roared out now:

"Damme, sir, do you think I'm a pauper? Put me down for five thousand dollars. If you lose it——!"

"Take it out of Uncle Bill's two million," Charley suggested to him blandly, and turned to Mr. Teeters. "Coming in, Skeet?" he asked.

"On what?" demanded the secretary passionately. "Wind? I ain't saved a cent, Come-On. A dip won't even look at me when I come along. He's afraid I'll try to borrow off him!"

"You're down for five hundred," Charley told him. "Take it out your pay. Stow it!"—as Mr. Teeters essayed a tremulous reply.

"What's the cue?" questioned Mr. Ball, now all eagerness. "What you going to play tomorrow?"

"U. S. Paper Collars," said Charley.

"Closed at 71 ⅞. Gain of two points."

Mr. Drew proclaimed this, and instantly bit his lip. He had been studying stocks, it seemed.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Mr. Ball. "Miller said today Collars were due for a rise. How do you do it, Charley? Put me hep, for the love of beans!"

"Dream it," said Charley. "Come around tomorrow. At the close. See the fun. Going to push the button for twenty-seven thousand shares."

Mr. Ball sprang clean out of his chair. He had done a lightning sum in mental arithmetic.

"What?" he yelled. "A one-hundred-and ninety-four-dollar margin?"

"Seven of it yours—you chaps," Charley answered. "Rest, velvet. Winnings."

He grinned again at Mr. Drew; but that plump person was gasping like a stranded fish. Apoplexy hovered near him.

V

CHARLEY was closeted with Old Whiskers at nine o'clock the next morning. He had slipped away from Mr. Teeters and whirled down-town alone in the big red car. It took him just three minutes to place his order with the broker and give instructions. He was leaving now.

"Gone to the country. Don't talk," he enjoined. "Clam. Shut tight. No questions answered. So long. Will phone."

He walked out followed by Mr. Gott's worshiping eyes. He had made the firm famous.

"Jake's Road House, Billy," Charley said to his driver. And in this manner he buried himself, as far as one may in Manhattan, from the ken of men.

Collars opened within an eighth of the close. Then, for some reason, it abruptly fell off four points. It hung around 66 for a while when it gradually recovered and crept up to 70. It stayed there; that is, it stayed there until one o'clock, when a flash came over the ticker. It read—

> President Owen, U. S. Paper Collars, blows brains out in private office.

Collars wilted. It dropped a point at a time until it registered 62⅝. Then came another flash—at one-thirty-five:

> Paper Collars. Huge defalcation suspected. Owen short big line of stocks.

Newspaper extras added to the rout. The very buttonholes fell out of Collars as it tumbled down; and several correlated stocks took a dangerous slant. It was a merry day in the bear-pit.

But up-town, in Charley's rooms, there was no great show of merrymaking. As the news of the break in Collars gained ground Mr. Drew and Mr. Link rushed from their respective habitats to the Rirebien. They met at the door and went up in company. They found only a distracted secretary hopping about the room and wiggling his mustache to the point of parting with it altogether.

"Where's the boy?" hurled Mr. Link at him.

"Wh—where is he?" stuttered Mr. Drew, who was quite off his center. "Gitt & Gott don't know, they say!"

"Gollamighty!" shrieked Mr. Teeters. "Don't ask me! I been looking for him everywhere. He's took the car and went. And I smashed the phone. It wore me out. Gollamighty! Gollamighty! Five hundred dollars!"

He resumed his caperings; from the look of it he might have been practising a new kind of One-Step. Mr. Drew and Mr. Link were hanging over the tape. They fed it through their fingers slowly, as if it were coated with glue. They couldn't tear themselves away from it. It possessed them with a horrible fascination, as might a squid winding its sticky arms around their bodies.

"We were wiped out long ago!" mourned the lawyer. "Lord, Lord! Look at it—52⅛!"

"Maybe he sold on the break," suggested Mr. Link hopefully. "That would save us something."

This stray straw to grasp at was swept away by the entrance of Mr. Teddy Ball. He sauntered in, a cigar stuck rakishly in his mouth. It was perfectly evident that he was trying to die game, though no one present cared how he did it. They were already dead.

"It's all over but the flowers!" he jauntily declaimed. "Charley's in the country—I wormed that much out of Gott—and it's two-thirty! Relatives and friends only. Interment private."

"Helafire!" croaked Mr. Teeters. "I got to work for nothing for two months!"

"Take a bath," Mr. Ball advised him. "It'll cool you off."

Whether Mr. Teeters would have acted on this friendly counsel can not be said, for the door opened and Mr. Carter strode in, fresh and rosy from his ride home.

And he was grinning!

The others regarded him as if a grimacing specter had popped up through the floor.

"Hello, folks!" Charley greeted them. "Fine up the river today."

Mr. Drew gazed around at the company.

"He doesn't know!" he muttered.

He tried to say more, but couldn't. Mr. Teeters could, however, and did.

"Come-On!" he squealed. "You've ruined us! I got to work——"

"Shut up — you!" barked Mr. Link. "Charley, me boy, don't mind him. We've got a jitney or two left among us yet."

"Yes, it's all right, Charley," supplemented Mr. Drew with an effort. "But I hope this will teach you——"

"Hold on!" interposed Mr. Ball, who was studying the grin which still showed broadly on Mr. Carter's face. "I believe—by Jove! —Say!—We took it for granted Charley was going long on Collars, but—"

"Went short," said Charley. "Thought I'd keep you guessing. Fun."

"Gracious heavens!" shouted Mr. Drew.

He lunged over to the ticker, but Mr. Ball was already there; so was Mr. Link.

"51⅞," called out the reporter. "½—¼ —50!"

"Brace up, Skeeters!" Charley adjured the dazed secretary. "You win. Twelve hundred anyway. Maybe more. Got to figure some."

A knock was given at the door. Charley opened it—and looked into Miss King's half-anxious, half-defiant eyes. The housekeeper was with her, playing chaperon.

"By George!" cried Charley gleefully.

"I saw your 'personal'—by chance—just an hour ago," faltered Miss King. "I tried to telephone, but——"

"Come in!" interrupted Charley. "Got something for you. Gee! Afraid I'd lost you!"

He caught her hands and drew her in. The housekeeper followed.

"Closed at 48½!" whooped Mr. Ball. "Bow-wow!"

He struck hands with Mr. Drew and the ex-champion, and they girdled Mr. Teeters and performed a dance around that agitated gentleman, in which the portly advocate threw dignity to the dogs. He was a winner, roughly reckoned, to the tune of twelve thousand dollars.

"You've won—again!" exclaimed Miss King. "Oh, I'm so glad!"

"Owe it to you," Charley told her. "Wait!"

He sat down at the table and wrote a check. The dance ceased suddenly. Something new was happening.

"Got my line in Collars from 71 to 66," explained Charley to the lady. "Cleaned up over half a million. Owe it to you. Started me. Want to make you a present. Only fair."

He handed her the check. She looked at it and burst into tears.

"Five thousand dollars! Oh, I can't take it—I can't!" she sobbed. "You don't know. It wasn't a tip; they guessed at it. And it was Gott's money. He paid me to——"

"Shoot Gott!" cut in Charley fiercely, to hide his embarrassment. "Forget him. I'm through with him. Last deal. All done. Take the five and—er—and—er——"

He halted lamely.

"Yes, I will! I will!" whimpered the young woman. "I'm through, too. I—I——"

She broke off, and throwing her arms about Charley's neck kissed him squarely in the mouth. She was gone—followed by the speechless housekeeper—before he could catch his breath.

There was a moment's awkward silence in the room. To relieve it Mr. Ball cleared his throat and remarked:

"Did I get you right, old sport? Nothing more doing in tape—no more for never?"

"Right," Charley answered. "Scared stiff."

"Then," exploded Mr. Ball, "you tell me what your system was, or I'll have your heart for breakfast!"

"Sure thing," said Charley. "He wised me."

He pointed a finger at Mr. Drew and grinned.

"Eh? I?" echoed the astounded man.

"Sure," said Charley. "That day in the car. I'm pushing that million you spoke about. Wait, Teddy."

He went into his bedroom. When he came out he set down on the table two paper boxes. They were of the kind they sell you linen collars in at the stores. Charley took the lid off one box.

"Have a peek," he invited.

The gentlemen looked in. They saw a dozen or so slips of cardboard. On each was written the name of a standard stock. Charley lifted the lid from the other box. In it were but two slips of cardboard. One was marked "Buy," the other was marked "Sell."

Very gently at first Mr. Drew's vest buttons began to joggle. Then they rose and fell, and surged and heaved, until in a storm of laughter the lawyer fell over into a chair and raised his hands to heaven in mute appeal.

"Simple," said Charley. "Shut your eyes. Draw from one box—stock. Draw from other—buy or sell. Did it every day. Before dinner."

"Oh, my aunt! Let me out of this!" yelped Mr. Ball. "Extra! All across the page!"

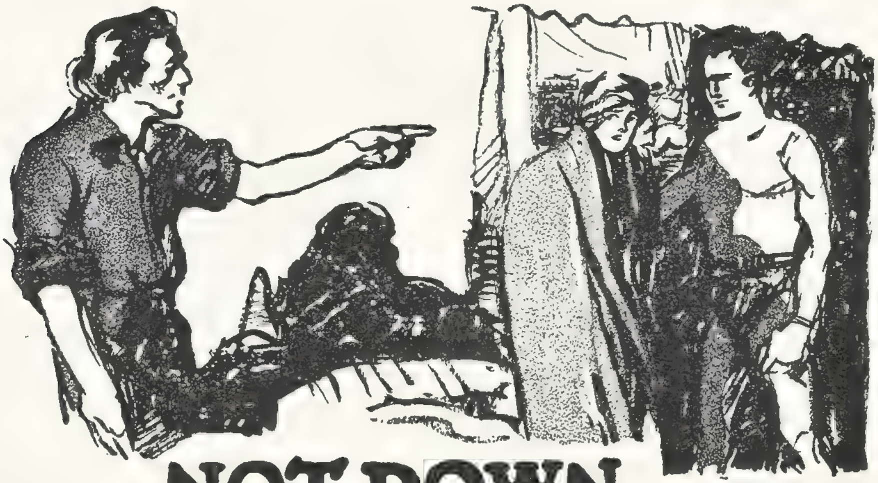
He fled through the door.

"Gollamighty!" squeaked Mr. Teeters. "Why didn't I think of that?"

"Because," responded Mr. Link solemnly, "your head is hollow. Charley, boy, I give in! It's just dummed luck that's ailing ye——sorra more!"

"Sure," said Charley.

The next adventure of *Come-On Charley* will appear complete in the January issue.



NOT DOWN ON THE BILL

by J·U·GIESY

THE band stopped playing. Throughout the "big top" there fell one of those pauses which always precede a major act on the bill—a sort of preliminary silence which arrests the attention of the spectators and contributes in a subtle manner to the nerve-tension which the amusement-seeking public now considers synonymous with getting their money's worth.

High up on a spidery tower, midway of the tent, and directly in front of the reserved section, movement occurred. A man arose and approached a black square on which shone polished levers. A second figure arose, cast off a robe which shrouded its outlines, and stood revealed as a girl in pale pink fleshings about supple, pliant torso and limbs.

Viewed from below she looked small, dainty, young and blonde in a gold-and-crimson way. She took up a sort of wand and advanced to the edge of the tower's top, from which a wire stretched down at a slight angle from an upright, beside a little ladder-like set of steps.

The ringmaster raised his hands. The silence continued. All other acts in the three rings below, and on the wires and trapeze above, came to a halt. The announcer's megaphone rang out to all parts of the monster tent:

"Ladies and gentlemen! Mlle. Mitchi Maya in her daring performance on the Live Wire! There are five thousand volts of deadly current passing through the wire upon which she works. Five thousand volts! Enough to strike a dozen men dead. A slip—a misstep—ah! Permit me to ask you all to maintain absolute silence during this exceedingly hazardous act. Are you ready, Mlle. Maya? Then—go!"

With a crackling sputter, two large arc-lights, one green on the tower, one red above the net where the wire ran down and ended, leaped into life as the man on the tower pushed a shining lever home. The girl bowed. She ran up the little steps to a level with the wire. She bowed again, poised like a diver; then—she stepped out on the wire itself.

A burst of flame came from under her shoe at the contact. The side of her body above the limb she stood on sprang into an outline of tiny parti-colored lights. She advanced a step. Again a flash of blue fire marked her action. Lights outlined the limb and girdled her slender waist on the opposite side.

She put down both feet and stood drawn in colored light. She walked, she ran, she danced on the deadly thing beneath her, turned and ran back to the ladder-like steps, and so down to the tower-top.

Already her assistant was busy. As the avid crowd sighed its relief and gaped for more, he led her to the edge, this time beneath the wire.

She turned back her face and seized something in her mouth. On her back the man was fastening something, one could not just see what; but in a moment one understood. She lifted her naked arms. The wings of a giant butterfly sprang into view. They waved as in preparation for flight, and —she was off!

Hanging by her teeth, arms outstretched, the wings and her body a mass of scintillating brilliance, the wheel upon which she slid and beneath which she clung throwing off sparks like the flare of a trolley from a charged wire!

She flashed down the wire, landed in the net and stood bowing to the wave of applause which greeted her having accomplished the thing once more. Then she slid to the ground on a rope, ran from the ring and so back to the "trapping-room."

The "Human Butterfly" act of the Barnaby Shows was ended.

It was a genuine "thriller." I, who was press agent of Barnaby's Shows, knew all about it. I knew that it had already been the indirect cause of a man's death, and of a wedding; and that it had nearly killed the woman who had just performed it anew and was making her way out of the ring while the audience rustled back to a casual interest in less sensational numbers of the bill.

I glanced into her face and nodded as she passed me in the fly of the big top. She nodded back with a smile. She was as winsome, as fresh near at hand as she looked on the tower. She was young, and seemingly happy.

I remembered the night when her petite body lay unconscious in the net. For the wire on which she worked was really charged as the announcer had claimed. The act was risky. It was genuine—no fake.

Forget that I am a press agent, because the story of the thing is true, on my honor as a man.

WE OF the circus know that about once every so often the public must have a thrill in their bill of entertainment. Human nature stays pretty much the same from year to year. The Romans had gladiatorial combats, and the old barons and such, knightly tournaments. Folks got hurt in those affairs.

Nowadays people like to see men and women go up in balloons and jump off with a few yards of canvas between them and kingdom come, or else see a loop-the-loop, or an airman fly upside down—anything where a mishap will mean sudden death. I don't know why, but it's so. You know it.

And so we amusement-venders have to pull a dangerous stunt now and then. That is how Pitkin came to dope out the "Butterfly" in the first place. He was our electrician. We have a new one now. But he fixed this "thriller" and it gave one audience, at least, a sensation not down on the bill.

Pitkin was nuts on electricity—had all sorts of funny notions about what it could do—was always experimenting with the "juice," and he certainly knew how to make it do what he wanted it to.

He figured that a big act like this, full of blue sparks and things, would make a big hit, and he put it straight up to old man Barnaby himself.

At first Barnaby was shy of the thing. Then his need of a new act and the scheme of the thing itself took hold on him. Pitkin assured him that he could make it as safe as a church during Lent, and he fell for the act and had it built.

Now in itself, the act is all right—if something don't go wrong. That's the whole thing with most of the big stunts, however. It's the thing which sometimes gives the dear public something not down, and it's because of the off chance of something *going* wrong that they all hold their breaths and hope. But they're not hoping it will.

In working, Mitchi wore insulated shoes and her tights were rubber, too. The mouthpiece of her pulley was made of soft rubber into which she bit. Unless she were to brush the wire with her naked arms or her face she was pretty safe.

She had to be quick at the net, of course, so as to hit it right and not fall against the wire. But that's nothing much for the trained acrobat which she was.

Still, when it came to getting a woman for the act after it was built, Pitkin and Barnaby had some trouble, until they picked up Mitchi Maya out of an aerial troupe.

She'd been with the show for some time and was about the neatest little gymnast you ever saw. She had blue eyes like the flowers of wild flax, and a little straight nose, and a clear, fine skin, with a figure as supple and pliant as a spring. And she had a nerve to match her good looks, which isn't always the rule by a long shot.

The old Hungarian who was head of the aerial troupe had picked her up as a baby, adopted and trained her, and he always kept her with him. There was some story about a widowed mother in the old country, and I know Mitchi used to send money somewhere over there.

Well, when she heard about the "Butterfly" going begging for a woman, I guess she got a bug she could save a lot more money out of the job. They pay big for such stunts. She thought if she earned enough she could get the old dame over here and sort of look after her first hand instead of by correspondence.

First off she had a long powwow with the old Magyar who had raised her, and though he put up some kick about her leaving his act, he gave in in the end like we all do for a pretty woman. Next she goes to the "old man" and says she'll sign on for the big bill; and the first thing we knew Pitkin and she were working the thing up between shows and before performances, after the big top was up.

The act created a good deal of excitement, even among our crowd themselves. I remember we all stood around mighty shaky the first time it got a try-out.

Some of the women got pretty pale the first time that little kid stepped out on that hell-spitting wire in her little pink tights, and I know I felt sort of lumpy in the throat myself.

But Mitchi was as cool as a nice icy grapefruit, and she got by with the trial in great shape. Then, too, Pitkin swore there wasn't any real danger.

He explained all about it. It seems that the balancing-wand she carried, with a big brass knob on the end, was a sort of safety device. At least that is what I gathered from his line of talk. He said the knob collected all the surplus electricity which wasn't taken care of by her shoes and suit.

It was something like some sort of jar—Leyden he called it. Anyway, as I understood it, it was a sort of fancy lightning-rod she carried, which caught up all the diffused currents and made her safe. As for the slide, it only lasted a few seconds, and the rubber mouthpiece was built so that she couldn't get hurt.

Still, it sure looked fierce to see that kid frolicking around on the thing. It gave me the willies the first time, and it sort of gets me fussed up now and again, even now. You see I can't just forget what happened—once.

AFTER the trial we all congratulated them, and Mitchi laughed, with her little red mouth open so you could see her strong white teeth. She said it was a lot easier in fact than the trapeze act of the old Magyar's she had left. As for Pitkin, he grunted and let it go at that. Nobody expected anything else from him.

He was a funny fellow, dark as Mitchi was light, and wiry, with a sort of sallow skin and a great mop of black hair which he wore so long it curled up at the back like a duck's tail. He had black eyes, or at least black-brown, and a half-way discouraged mustache. By his own tell he was a Russian who had left the old homestead on the jump, about a hose-length ahead of a Siberian excursion the Czar was getting up for some undesirable "cits."

Pitkin made a getaway and beat the police to the frontier. He'd been what he called a student with progressive thinks in his tank. He had a sort of slow, quiet way about him and wasn't much of a mixer. He'd rather get off by himself and mope around half a day than join a friendly gabfest or a game of cards. But he sure was studious when it came to using the "juice" for funny effects.

Oh, he was bright all right—only, to look at the chap, you wouldn't ever have thought he had a live wire of feeling coiled up in himself. He just gloomed around and we rather let him alone, most of the time.

But he was human under all his reserve —human in a wild, untrained sort of way, for all his being a student. Dogs, you know, are said to be domesticated wolves, and Pitkin was human the same way that a wolf is a dog.

I fancy the Czar was right—the chap wasn't safe to run with ordinary mutts like the rest of our crowd. We found that out later, too, and it all came about through the butterfly act.

Being with Mitchi like he was, in trying out the act and working it up he saw a lot of the girl. As a matter of fact I don't blame him for getting stuck on that pretty little kid. She was pretty, and game, and on top of that she was a sweet-dispositioned little thing and a prime favorite with our bunch.

The upshot of it was that the Russky fell head over heels in love and wanted to get married right away. Mitchi told him straight out that she didn't care for him that way and that she wouldn't marry any man unless she loved him. He took it mighty badly and grew more sullen than ever.

He was one of those people who have to have what they want, no matter how they get it; and he wouldn't take no for an answer. Every now and then he'd come back with his proposal. And each time he got the same answer he grew a trifle more grouchy about it. He used to go mooning around with his big eyes, black and mournful, except when he was looking at Mitchi, and then they seemed to snap, and dance, and sparkle.

I've seen him stand and eye her, and after a while spread out his fingers like claws and shut them as if he imagined he could grab her and drag her to him. He'd get a sort of hungry wolf-look on him at times like that.

But Pitkin wasn't the only person who had found Mitchi attractive. Before she left her own to go into Pitkin's act, Mitchi had been a member of a Hungarian family. It wasn't a family, really, like some of them are, but a bunch the old Magyar who ran it had picked up here and there and trained. One of them was a young fellow named Collins whom the old man had grabbed just before Barnaby signed the troupe.

He was a mighty good aerialist, was Tom Collins, but instead of a Hungarian he was Irish, with brown hair, blue eyes, and a mighty well set-up figure. Before she left the act he did one of those flying swings and catches with Mitchi. One of the fellows would grab her by the heels and swing head downward with her. After a bit he'd let go and toss her to Tom, who was hanging by his knees from his bar.

It was a trick calling for a cool head and a sure eye for distance, because the Magyar people worked without a net, and it's a long ways from the bars to the ground. Their apparatus was placed 'way up toward the canvas of the big top, higher even than the top of the tower for the Butterfly number, and a miss would have spelled good night for Mitchi. Tom, like Pitkin, was human—in a more human fashion. He was a good old-dog-Tray sort of human, though his nerve showed up all right when it was needed and made him a bit of the wolf for a time.

You can't expect a man to go on catching a pretty girl in his arms twice a day for months, without noticing what sort of a girl she is. Collins got so he had a hungry look in his eyes, too, those days.

He had a rather romantic respect for the girl, which made his love a wholly different thing from Pitkin's. Just the same we folks knew he was crazy about her, and Pitkin knew it, too—trust a man like him to sense it!

The result was that one day when Mitchi turned him down pretty sharply and told him to cut out his nagging in the future, he up and accused her of liking Collins better than she did him.

Mitchi rather lost her head for a minute and told him he was a pretty good guesser, though up to that time, as I know now, Tom had never told her a word about how he felt. I guess maybe the girl spoke on impulse, right out of her heart. She'd had a chance to notice big-hearted Tom, all right, the same as he had her, and she was a lot nearer his age and more his sort.

Anyway that's what she said, and Pitkin blew up. He swore that before Tom should have her he'd kill him, and added, if that wasn't enough he'd kill her.

Mitchi told him to stop talking foolish because Tom hadn't showed any signs of wanting to marry anybody that she knew of; and she certainly wouldn't marry a man unless he asked her, and not always then.

But Pitkin was too crazy mad to have any sense.

"You want to marry zat peeg, Collins!" he sputtered. "You haf say eet—but you s'all not. I swear it. Me you s'all marry an' no uzzer. Say zat you weel marry me, Mitchi, or I s'all keel zis Collins. I weel keel—keel—even you, Mitchi, my heart—even you!"

He lifted his hands and, clutching into his mane of black hair, waggled his head around and groaned.

At least that's what the ringmaster, who happened to be passing says he did. The ringmaster jumped in and called him down pretty swift, and he moped off.

OF COURSE the thing leaked during the day, and Tom heard all about it. That night in the trapping-room, while everybody was dressing, he walked over to the Russian right before the whole male end of the show and put it to him straight, to let the girl alone. Of course he didn't mention Mitchi's name—Tom wouldn't—but we all knew what he meant.

"Look here, Pitkin," he began. "I've heard a lot of stuff you've pulled about bumpin' me off. Now that's all right. Any time you want to get busy—why, start. But that ain't all. I ain't goin' to mention names, but I'm hep to what's eatin' you, my boy, and I want to tell you that maybe that sort of work goes where you come from, but it's too raw for over here. You want to be careful how you spill any more chatter like that while you're runnin' with this bunch, bo."

For a minute Pitkin didn't answer. He stood with his black eyes snapping, breathing hard, and a look on him like a dog getting ready to jump at your throat, then—

"I say w'at I mean, Misser Collins," he got out between gasps.

Tom gave him back stare for stare.

"I hope not, Pitkin," he says rather slow, "because if I hear of your trying any more of this hazing—of these threats—oh, not about me, Pitkin—but on somebody else—I'll break your —— neck."

Pitkin yelled out in Russian and jumped for him. I was there and saw it. Tom just put out a hand and shoved him back. The boy wasn't looking for trouble.

After a bit we got Pitkin quieted down and the thing blew over for the night; but as it happened later Tom was a bit of a prophet without really meaning to be.

When he was dressed for his act, which went on before Mitchi's, Tom hunted her up, however, and cautioned her to be careful of the Russian, and told her, if she found herself needing help, to call on him. Mother Boone, our "circus mother," says they talked mighty low for a spell after that, and that Mitchi laughed in a rather embarrassed fashion and ran back into the women's section of the tent, while Tom walked off whistling in a rather self-satisfied way.

After that Mitchi began to spend a lot of time with Collins, and Pitkin got so that he went around muttering and mumbling to himself. I think he really was touched a little. It's the only way I can explain the thing he planned to do. I noticed, too, that Tom used to watch the Russian every time the act went off after that.

The aerial act with which he worked, although beginning before the butterfly, stopped while the big act was on. Tom's bar was nearest the tower, perhaps twenty feet away and higher than its top.

Well, he'd sit on his trapeze during the interruption and watch every move the Russian made, and though none of us knew it then, he had planned it all out in case anything should happen while the butterfly act was on.

We made a couple of jumps after the two men had their run-in in the trapping-room, and nothing happened. Everything went smooth, and most of us had about let the matter slip out of our minds. And then the thing hit us like a shock of Pitkin's own "juice" and knocked us off our pins.

WE WERE playing a two-day stand and the business was tremendous. Every performance packed the big top to the canvas. The Butterfly was simply going immense.

It was the last night of the stand. Collins was dressing for his turn when Pitkin rushed into the trapping-room and began to rummage about in his own trunk like a dog clawing for a buried bone. All the time he was mumbling away and sort of chuckling to himself.

At the time Tom didn't give much attention to him, but afterward he remembered and spoke of it to me.

Tom finished dressing and went out to the fly of the big top to wait for his troupe's signal. There he found Mitchi, wrapped in her cloak, waiting for the Russian to join her before they should get their call. Quite as a matter of course, Tom stopped and spoke to the girl.

She seemed rather nervous and hardly herself. He asked her what was the matter.

"I'm afraid, Tom," she told him without any feminine fencing. She'd come to trust Collins pretty fully. "Boris—" Pitkin's name was Boris—"has been awfully queer all day. He's asked me to marry him twice since morning." She laughed in a forced fashion, and went on: "That's a record. Once a day has been his limit. But ever since the last time, this afternoon, he's gone around muttering to himself—and I don't like his looks. Honest, Tom, I don't believe he's just right. I believe he's crazy——"

Collins grinned.

"He's crazy about you, all right," he said.

"I meant crazy—about me," said Mitchi. "And he's been threatening again, Tom. He says—he'll kill you—unless I do what he wants."

"I ain't nervous," Tom assured her. "He talks too much. Your bad man talks after, not before. But if he don't stop pesterin' you, why—I'll have to marry you myself."

Mitchi laughed in a nervous fashion.

"Then if he keeps it up I'll have a right to break his neck," Collins went on, rather carried away by his words and the girl's demeanor and nearness, and his own love for every atom of her. "I told him I would once."

Mitchi gave him a smile.

"It's all right to joke," said she, "but I'm really nervous tonight, Tom. If you'd seen Boris' eyes——"

Tom rather lost his head for a minute.

"I ain't joking, Mitchi," he informed her in a way which brought her eyes up to his. "An' I tell you what you do. After tonight go to the old man and put it to him straight. He'll call this guy off or tie a can on him. Or—if you'd rather, marry me, Mitchi. As my wife, your bughouse Russky wouldn't have a leg left to stand on. Can't you think of worse things than bein' Mrs. Collins?"

I don't know what Mitchi would have answered to that, because just then Tom's act was called and he had to leave on the jump. Even love has to step down when your number is called in the circus. He joined his troupe, trotted in and was pulled up to his bar.

Later he told me that it wasn't till after that, when the act was really started, that he really began to feel worried. Then it came to him all at once that something was due to happen.

Just why it should be that night he didn't know. All along Pitkin's threats had gone for nothing. In fact Tom rather felt that the man was afraid to start any trouble. But now it hit him all at once that trouble was due.

He says he went through his own act by instinct pure and simple, and all the time something kept telling him to grab a rope and slide down and stop things before the Butterfly was called.

But he didn't. Circus people are pretty loyal to the show, as a class. They know the performance has to go on, no matter what happens; and most of them will suffer a lot of pain, or worry, or sickness, before they'll drop out of their act or make a holler of any sort. And the Butterfly is the big number, of course.

Tom told himself he was foolish; that just because he loved the girl so much he was nervous about her; that Pitkin was merely trying to scare her into the marriage, and he felt better—or at least he decided there was no cause for worry. Still, all the time he was worrying.

He says now that he knew something was coming, only he wouldn't admit it to himself because he couldn't believe anybody would attempt a thing as fiendish as the thing Pitkin did.

Just the same, when Mitchi and Pitkin came in, Tom watched the girl climb the tower, and all his love took hold on him afresh. She was little, and slender, and sweet, and he could see her face looked worried, too.

When the band stopped, and the megaphone barked, and his own and all the other acts in the rings came to a pause, he says now, he had all he could do to keep from yelling out and telling them to stop right there.

All he did do, however, was to draw himself up and sit on his bar, watching Pitkin and Mitchi's little pink figure, with every muscle in him tight with watching.

The act began all right. Mitchi did her stunts on the wire and came back for the slide. Pitkin took her to the edge after he'd fastened on her wings, and held the mouthpiece for her. They did it that way then, though now she always takes the mouthpiece in her teeth first. And there's a reason for that.

Well, Pitkin, who always wore rubber gloves, lifted the mouthpiece for her to bite, and Tom saw him speak to her when he did it. Mitchi shook her head and shrugged her shoulders. The Russian frowned and sort of nodded his head.

Mitchi flapped her wings and tilted back her pretty little face. Even then Tom never suspected anything except that Pitkin had proposed again, which he had—the last time, too, as it happened. I guess in his crazy mind he thought he was giving the girl a final chance.

ALL at once Mitchi goes up on her toes and grips the rubber bit in her mouth, and then, right before the whole tent, she stiffens and seems to stretch out in a sort of spasm. And before anybody could lift a hand, Pitkin pushes her off the tower and down she goes.

You know how a current will produce a spasm of the muscles. Well, that's what happened. When the current hit her through the jaws, they locked into the rubber and she couldn't let go or fall off. Pitkin knew that and figured on it to give the current time to kill her.

She flashed along the wire, hit the net and lay still under the wire, with the bit still fast in her teeth. And she never moved.

It sure was awful. When she hit, some of the lamps she wore broke and cut through her tights, but she never felt it. She just lay there and cooked. She was unconscious.

I gave one look at her poor little huddled shape in the net and turned away—sick.

Then I looked up at the tower. Pitkin stood there with his arms folded and his head back, and the most awful, hellish grin on his face I ever saw.

The whole tent was in an uproar. Several men ran toward the tower as if to climb up and shut off the current. Women were screaming and fainting all over the place, and men were yelling and cursing in excitement.

The ringmaster was trying to prevent a panic in the crowd. Through the megaphone he began barking at Pitkin over the shrieks and yells:

"Turn off the juice! Turn off the juice!"

Pitkin seemed to wake up at that, and looked down. The smile on his devil's face got wider, it seemed. He waved a hand toward poor little Mitchi and pointed to himself, as if to say he had meant to do it, and had succeeded, and defied us to do anything in time to save the life he was taking.

By that time one of the boys was half way up the tower, but he never would have made it in time. Even if he'd got up, he'd have had to fight Pitkin before he could reach the switch.

Right there the band began playing, by orders, to quiet the crowd. It seemed ghastly, too. There they were banging out ragtime, with that girl burning to death before everybody's eyes. I felt sick all over, believe me. It was fierce.

IT WAS Tom Collins, the man who really loved her, who saw the only way out and took it on the jump. While we were yelling at Pitkin to cut off the current, and he was grinning his hellish triumph, Tom got busy. He let himself down from his bar by his arms and began to swing.

He gave himself a pretty strong momentum and forced himself to wait until it was sufficient. Then he let go. I've mentioned that his bar was higher than the tower and twenty feet beyond it.

When Collins let go, he came down in a straight foot-dive for the top of the tower itself, where Pitkin stood waving his hands and beginning a sort of fiendish clog-dance, right on the edge.

Pitkin's back was toward Tom and he didn't see him coming. I did. I saw him leave the bar and come down like an arrow, holding both feet together. Right in the middle of Pitkin's insane dancing Tom hit the tower, tried to straighten up, and staggered, lurching full into the Russian's back.

Pitkin yelled out once. He screamed like a wounded animal sometimes will—a wild, hoarse, unhuman-like screech. Then, thrown completely off his feet by Collins' impact, he plunged out from the tower's edge and fell over and over into the ring below, to lie awfully still with his black head bent back under his shoulders.

Collins paid no attention to that. He was at the switch. When he bumped into Pitkin it stopped his own fall and straightened him up.

In one leap he reached the switchboard and pulled out the lever.

The lamps sputtered and died, and poor little Mitchi relaxed in the net. I think everybody in the tent sighed at once. It sounded like a gust of wind.

Two of the tent-men were already swarming up ropes to the net, and Tom was racing down the tower. By the time they lowered Mitchi over the edge of the net, he was there to take her in his arms. He caught her and cuddled her up on his breast and kissed her before the whole tent. Then he turned and raced for the exit.

The band was still playing and the other acts started again at the ringmaster's signal. Two hands picked Pitkin up and lugged him out to the trap-room. Collins with Mitchi in his arms passed me at the fly.

There was a wild, fierce look in the boy's eyes. Just for that once I saw the old primitive, human-wolf strain look out. He gave me a glance and ran on into the woman's section of the dressing-tent, without so much as by your leave.

I think he'd forgotten everything on earth but the woman rolled in against his heart. He laid her down and began pumping her arms up and back and down again, like you do those of a man who has drowned. All at once he spoke:

"Get a doctor—a doctor—for God's sake! Ain't anybody got any sense? Get a doctor! She ain't dead! She won't die! I won't let her, I tell you! Get a doctor—quick!"

Some of the girls and Mother Boone tried to get him to let them take charge, but he wouldn't. As it happened, though, there was a doctor in the crowd, and by that time he was coming into the dressing-tent door. He came in and took hold in good shape as soon as Tom would let him.

At first the boy was so rattled he wouldn't let anybody touch her; just knelt there beside her little pink body and snarled, and worked her arms up and down.

I went up and told him the man was a physician, and because he knew me he listened. He looked up at the doctor; then staggered to his feet.

"Take me away, Bill," he mumbled.

I took him by the arm and led him outside the door of the girls' section.

There he balked. He wouldn't go a step farther. We hung around for a good two hours, and though everything else was loaded up for the jump, we didn't strike that tent till Mitchi could be moved. Old Barnaby sure acted white about that. A delay means a lot to show-folks; but Barnaby sure did the handsome. I guess he felt sort of guilty about having let Pitkin fix up the act in the first place, for he paid Mitchi's hospital-bill.

* * *

IT WAS about one o'clock when the doctor came out and says he thinks she'll pull through with good care, and that he's going to call an ambulance. When he heard that, Tom began to laugh all at once.

"I told you she wouldn't die!" he said between chuckles to me. "I wouldn't let her! She's mine! But Pitkin died, didn't he, Bill? I told him I'd break his —— neck!"

And with that Tom dropped to the floor in a genuine faint.

He stayed behind, too, when the show went on. All the four weeks Mitchi was in the hospital he hung around. By the time she was ready to come back to the show, the two had decided to sign each other up for a life-engagement. They went off and got married, and Mitchi came back as Mrs. Collins.

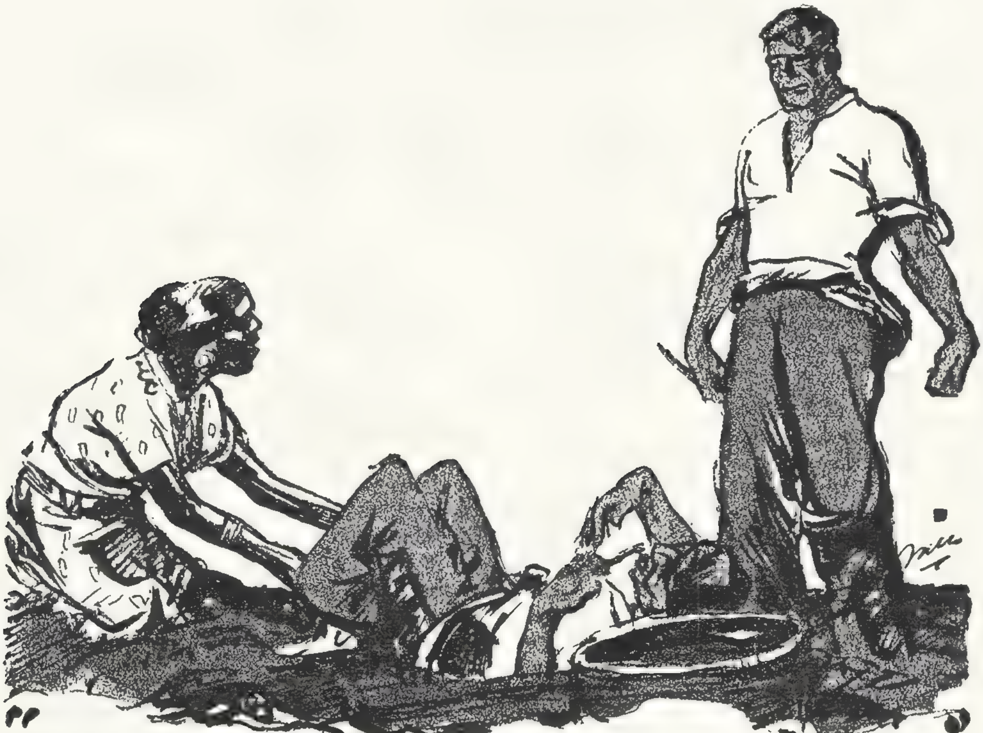
But they work under her name. They bill as a brother-and-sister act, and Tom Collins handles the switch.

As for Pitkin, his neck was certainly broken. I think he deserved it for what he did that night. I've mentioned that the man was an electrical expert, and he had planned this thing all out. He'd taken an extra pulley and mouthpiece and soaked the whole thing in a strong copper solution for days.

That night he switched pulleys and put on his copper-loaded one. When Mitchi bit it the current jumped into her like lightning. That, by the way, is why she takes the bite now before her wings go on.

If any josher tried that stunt again, she'd taste it or drop on the tower, at least, even if Tom didn't get it first in his bare hands. He doesn't wear gloves. Tom Collins is sure mighty careful of his wife.

We picked up a new electrician, and nobody wept for Pitkin. Even the coroner, when he'd heard all the evidence we could give, decided his death was due to accidental causes, and nobody kicked on that.



"FOR WAYS THAT ARE DARK"

by NORMAN SPRINGER

COSSACK was in the throes of the "lay-up" season. Cossack was further convulsed with the knowledge of the Black Sisters. The Black Sisters was a pearl—a pearl such as is found only once in a generation. It was a deep, lustrous, living black in color, and it was double—two perfect spheres grown together in the same shell. It was the catch of twenty years.

Not since the famed Southern Cross had been found in the eighties had Ninety Mile Beach yielded such a prize. There was no other topic of conversation in the pubs, and the great pearl grew in size and value daily. And Captain Wayne who had found the Sisters went on a close-lipped spree in celebration of his good fortune; while his partner, Bates, went to Broome, and with him, rumor had it, went the Black Sisters.

Cossack is a town on the pearling-coast of Northwestern Australia. That is, for some three months of the year Cossack is a town.

When the hurricanes—the fierce "Cockeyed Bobs"—sweep in from the Indian Ocean and send the pearlers scurrying to shelter, Cossack awakens to a brief, lurid life; and two troopers of the West Australia Mounted Police move down from Roebourne.

Many of the luggers "lay-up" and refit at Cossack; the shell and pearls are disposed of there; the crews "blue" their pay-day, and the shanty-pubs reap a rich harvest and dispose of much bottled vitriol. And white men and yellow men, black and brown men, and mongrels of all races, rub shoulders on the sands of Cossack, barter and drink, fight, and break the Ten Commandments in their pursuit of pleasure and treasure.

JOHN SMITH staggered to the door of his shack, and, through red-rimmed, bloodshot eyes, stared out upon Cossack. John Smith was a beach-comber, an ex-remittance man and waster. He owned a drink-shattered body; a reckless, evil face, blotched with the poison of the boozing kens of all Australasia; no morals—and a perennial thirst.

Cossack, stark and ugly in the white glare of the tropical sun, returned the stare of Smith. The lopsided street of sand was deserted in the noonday heat, but from the iron-roofed shanty-pubs came the sounds of the revelry that never ceased, day or night, during the season at Cossack.

From the nearest shanty rose the dismal wail of a phonograph, and the raucous howl of tuneless voices raised in song. The beach-comber listened to the sounds thirstily. The dark brown of last night's carouse was in his mouth, and his pockets were empty.

He speculated upon his chances of a favorable and wet reception if he joined the revelers. But he decided the day was yet too young. By nightfall the spenders would be hilarious and open-handed, and he could sponge unnumbered drinks, and mayhap, also, some money.

Mr. Tom Gee Bong walked out of the door of Johnny Blair's Place and turned across the sand toward Smith's shack.

"Now I wonder," muttered Smith, "what that damned Chink wants with me?"

Mr. Tom Gee Bong was a product of Singapore and Oxford. He was a full-blooded Chinaman; his English was precise and correct, and he wore the best clothes of any man on the Coast. Withal, he was looked upon askance by the democratic, polygot community. For although Mr. Tom Gee Bong neither toiled nor spun, yet did he reap, richly. He was deeply versed in the wiles of the Orient and the vices of the Occident, and he was regarded as the slipperiest I. P. B.* on the Pearling Coast.

"Mr. Smith," said Tom Gee Bong, "if you will favor me with a few moments of your time, I would like to discuss a matter with you that may prove profitable to us both."

"Sure you mean both?" inquired Smith, regarding his visitor with disfavor. "Talking business with you ain't a thing I'm keen on—you're blasted cheeky, Bong, to want to talk business with me."

Smith had a keen recollection of a previous discussion with Tom Gee Bong that had netted him six months in the jail at Broome for opium running.

Tom Gee Bong smiled blandly, and casually transferred from one coat pocket to another a pint flask of whisky.

"Come in," said Smith cordially.

Smith took a long swig at the bottle and placed it, half empty, on the table between them. He scanned the impassive face of the Chinaman.

"Well, spit it out!" he exclaimed. "I know right well you didn't come over here just to give me a drink."

"No," smiled Bong. "The drink was incidental—merely a means of gaining your ear. I came to talk to you about obtaining possession of the Black Sisters pearl."

Smith stared at the other with astonishment.

"What bally rot!" he cried. "The Black Sisters is in Broome by now, locked up in Government House. Bates took it up with him on the Swan, last week."

Bong leaned across the table and lowered his voice.

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*Illicit pearl-buyer.

"The pearl is in Cossack," he said. "The tip that Bates took it with him to Broome was untrue. Altieri has it."

Smith took a pull at the bottle and demanded suspiciously:

"What's the job? Of course, you want me to do the work—and I ain't goin' to do it."

"It is five thousand pounds," continued Bong. "You get half. I have a market all ready. There is little risk."

"It's a croakin' job," said Smith. "If Altieri has the pearl, he'll have it on him—in a chamois around his neck, the way all skinners always carry the stuff. You know Altieri—he'd have to be laid out before he'd give it up; and I ain't ready to swing yet. How do you know Altieri's got it, anyway?"

"From Warrigah," said Bong.

"So you're next to the woman!" And Smith swore admiringly. "My oath, you are a slick one, Tom."

The Chinaman proceeded without noticing the compliment.

"Altieri does not carry the pearl on his person. He has it concealed in his shack—I know where. I could get it myself, but you know my rule. And I want to make amends to you for that little slip-up on the opium last year."

"Yes," growled Smith contemptuously. "I know your rule. No risk and all the profit—that's you. But spit it out. I'm game for the job, providin' there's no killin' to it. What's your scheme?"

* * *

AN HOUR later, Tom Gee Bong arose and terminated the conversation.

"It is decided then—tomorrow night," he stated.

"Right O!" returned Smith. "Tomorrow night."

He tilted and emptied the bottle.

"Say, Tom," he queried, "how's chances for a bit of change? I'm strapped."

The Chinaman drew out his pocketbook, extracted a five-pound note and tossed it to the other.

"Thanks," said Smith. And Tom Gee Bong departed.

A half-hour later, Smith, with an idea of his own, left his shack and proceeded to the beach of the lagoon whose safe harborage makes Cossack. Here he boarded a skiff and sculled out to where his sole possession of worth lay; a little seven-ton yawl, by means of which he eked out his dubious livelihood.

For the rest of the day he busied himself overhauling the gear, bending the sails, and generally preparing the little craft for sea.

At dusk he returned ashore, and resolutely passing the shanty bars, repaired to the store of Nicolas the Greek. Here he expended all of the money Tom Gee Bong had given him for sea-stores.

"Ay," he replied carelessly to the Greek's smiling, professional curiosity. "Just a little run down the Beach—*beche-de-mere.*"

He took the stores aboard the yawl. Then he took his water-beakers ashore and filled them, returning them aboard, also.

His preparations completed, Smith returned to his shack. And the little, half-naked Chinese boy who had trailed him unceasingly all afternoon and evening drifted off toward the Chinese camp.

Smith cooked himself some supper, boiled a billy of tea, and over this tepid beverage composed himself to waiting. The sounds of wild revelry mounted with the moon, and as the night waxed the real business of the Cossack day, which is to get drunk, proceeded.

Smith listened longingly to the uproar—shouts, curses, ribald choruses—but continued to sip his tea as he smoked and perfected his plans.

"Tomorrow night! Huh! Five thousand quid—that means it's worth twice as much. And me take all the risk and then split. Tom Gee Bong can go hang. Tomorrow———!"

It would not be advisable, he decided, to clear out immediately with the pearl. That might look suspicious. If Tom Gee Bong had told the truth—and knowing Bong, he had no doubt the information was correct—the job would be but a matter of moments if all went well.

He had told the Greek he intended a *beche-de-mere* trip. That would account for his departure. He would leave in the morning, in broad daylight. And as for the night's work—an alibi. If he showed himself among the roysterers at the pubs before, and again immediately after the job, his absence of a few moments would not be noted. If need arise, a dozen men could truthfully swear for him.

And as for Tom Gee Bong—well, the wily Oriental had overreached himself for once.

His mouth was closed; he would not dare even hint of what he knew.

Smith chuckled as he pictured the Chinaman's helpless rage when he discovered his confederate had been beforehand.

"Serve the blasted yellow blighter right," concluded Smith.

But Smith mused admiringly upon the Chinaman's shrewdness in discovering the Sisters' whereabouts. Yet it was so simple! Of course Altieri would have the pearl. Altieri was the best pearl-skinner on the Coast. To him came all the finest pearls of the catch. He was an artist. He could tell at a glance if a pearl were flawless, and if the removal of the outer skins would enhance the value.

Of course the Black Sisters would come to Altieri to be nursed and prepared for the market, while the word was given out that the gem had gone to Broome.

And Warrigah! Yes—Tom Gee Bong was a slick one, all right, to play up to the woman.

"Not such rotten taste, either," thought Smith, as he pictured the full-bosomed, comely half-caste in her street apparel—a bright green sarong that fell from her hips to her knees. She was yellow, and her eyes were Chinese eyes; but her bushy, kinky hair bespoke her a hybrid of the Coast.

Smith remembered when Altieri had acquired Warrigah from a Thursday Island pearler. Three pound ten and a bottle of square-face had been the consideration.

"She's half Chino and half devil," Captain White had said. "A good clubbing about once a month keeps her in order."

Altieri had taken the woman and the advice; and Warrigah, as befitted a "white-fellow's Mary," bent her back to the blows and her will to the whims of her lord, and murmured not. But Warrigah was a woman—and Tom Gee Bong was slick.

And the hiding place of the pearl! Who would ever think of looking into a battered old billy-can for ten thousand pounds. Lucky for him, too. He wouldn't care to tackle the job if Altieri carried the pearl on his person.

Not many men on the Coast would care to tackle Altieri—and he visioned the stubby little pearl-skinner with his scarred, leathery face and gorilla-like arms. A bad man, Altieri. Smith could understand Tom Gee Bong's reluctance to place himself within the skinner's reach. Hence he was to be the Chink's catspaw. Yes, Tom Gee Bong was a slick one, all right—but John Smith was slicker.

* * *

AT HALF PAST ten Smith left his shack. Cossack was alive and roaring. A reeling, squabbling, many-colored, many-tongued mob filled the bars and overflowed on to the lopsided street.

At the first pub he entered, Smith encountered Captain Wayne, engaged in his nightly celebration of the Sisters' discovery. With the practised art of the sponger Smith attached himself to the crowd that surrounded the hero and spender, and for the next two hours he followed in the sailor's wake as the latter journeyed from dive to dive.

He followed the crowd that followed the spender, out of Johnny Blair's Place and across the sand to next door—the joint of McManus. Smith melted into the shadow of the McManus shanty, and, when the unheeding group had passed inside, betook himself swiftly off toward the home of Altieri.

The establishment of Altieri consisted of two shacks; one the workshop of the pearl-skinner, the other his domicile. Between the two shacks was a ten-foot strip of sand.

Smith crept around the corner of the workshop and crouched in the shadow and listened. The sound of steady, measured breathing came through the open door of the Altieri living-room. Smith slipped across the narrow, intervening space and entered the hut.

For a moment he remained motionless, pressed against the wall. The deep, regular breathing of the two sleepers reassured him and he commenced to edge his way along the wall to his left.

"The first shelf on the wall, to the left of the door, beneath the shelf, in the billy-can hanging on the third nail," had been the explicit directions of Tom Gee Bong.

Smith's groping fingers struck the wooden end of the shelf. Feeling beneath, he touched the first nail from which hung a saucepan—the second nail, and the third.

He lifted the billy-can from its hook, removed the cover and thrust his hand inside. His fingers closed over a chamois-skin bag in which was something small and hard.

The woman, Warrigah, lying awake and watching at the side of her master, seized

Altieri by the shoulder and shook him, first gently then roughly.

"One damn fellow—he in room!" she cried aloud.

Smith dropped the billy-can with a startled oath and leaped for the door. He met the hurtling figure of Altieri in the doorway.

Smith clutched the other by the throat. The pair struggled through the door, Altieri clinging to the larger man. There was the flash of steel in the moonlight—once, twice, three times, as the knife descended.

The Thing that was Altieri lay limp, face up, a spreading pool of blood turning the white sand black in the night-light.

Smith, with a swift look about, disappeared around the corner of the workshop and, seeking the shadows, hurried toward the lights and noises of the boozing-kens.

Tom Gee Bong slipped from behind Altieri's shack and stood over the murdered man. The woman came from the hut and joined him. Leaning over the body, Tom Gee Bong loosened the blood-soaked shirt-front and thrust his hand within. He straightened up and spoke to the woman, and the two hurried off toward the harbor.

CAPTAIN WAYNE and his satellites stumbled out of the House of McManus and laid a zigzag course for the next port. Smith detached himself from the darkness of the McManus exterior and stumbled along with them.

An hour later Smith left the revelers and reeled drunkenly across the sand to his own shack. Inside, the door closed and bolted, Smith dropped his insobriety and lighted a lamp. He sat down at the table and prepared, for the first time, to examine his prize.

He fingered the hard lump in the chamois-skin bag with a thrill; opened the draw-string—and there rolled out into his expectant palm a plain white beach-pebble and a folded piece of paper.

Smith stared at the pebble in unbelief. Mechanically he opened the paper. With an oath he jumped to his feet and dashed out of the shack.

He ran swiftly the few hundred yards through the town to the beach. He headed for his skiff. The skiff was gone; and the spot where his yawl had lain at anchor was now only water. And John Smith raged up and down the beach, a stream of blasphemy running from his lips.

A silent group of men came running down the street to the beach. The little half-naked Chinese boy who led them pointed to the cursing figure at the water's edge.

"John Smith!" said the khaki-clad trooper. "In the name of the King—for murder!"

"You bloody thief," cried the sobered and wrathful Wayne. "What have you done with the pearl? Search him Riley! Search him!"

John Smith looked at the group and laughed.

"You lose," he said to Wayne; and he extended his hand with the crumpled piece of paper. By the light of a lantern they read:

MY DEAR MR. SMITH:
Pearl-skinners *always* carry the stuff in a chamois around the neck. We have borrowed your yawl. Thank you for your assistance.
TOM GEE BONG.

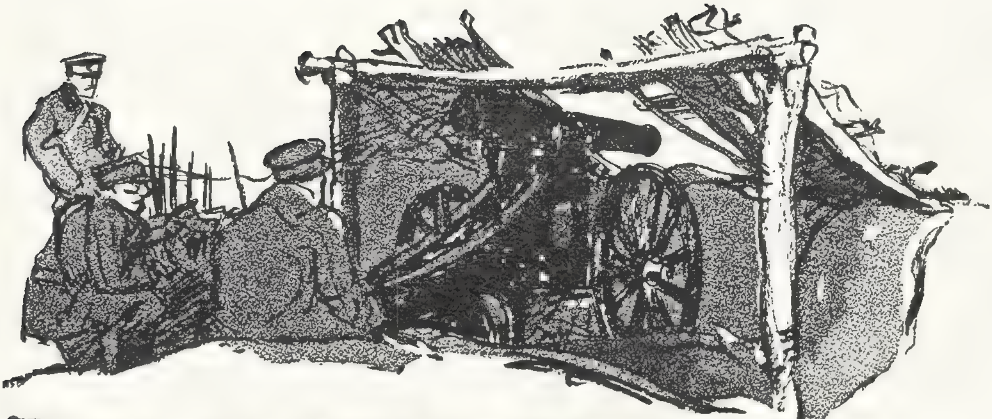
THE WEST

BY MARY CAROLYN DAVIES

A GAY life in the saddle,
A quick shot at the end;
The smile of a lass, the lip of a glass,
And the oath of a friend.

A foot deep in the leather,
A hand light on the rein,
A day in the blue, a pal that's true,
And a grave on the plain.

Who would pine for a hearth-fire?
Who'd die in a bed—
When there's room to die 'neath the blue range sky,
And stars overhead?



THE SINEWS OF WAR

A TWO-PART STORY—CONCLUSION

by ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

SYNOPSIS—On the Orient Express, *Daniel Blair*, an American adventurer-capitalist backed by U. S. financiers, whose admiration for Bulgaria brings him back to help her on the eve of the long-dreamed struggle against Turkey, runs foul of Austria's secret-agent, *Hélène von Anhalt*. Knowing *Blair*, and keen to learn the purpose of his visit, she attempts to rob him through her colleagues, *von Griffenstein* and *Kemil Bey*, one an Austrian, the other a Turkish spy.

At the Sofia station *Blair* is met by an old friend, *Major Boris Kurtsky*, nephew of *Vassili Kurtsky*, confidential minister to the Czar and the brains of Bulgaria. Here also he meets the girl, *Masoya Vavaroff*, heir to the old Macedonian Empire, and known to have great influence with those whose plans for a Balkan Nation include her marriage to a prince of the royal house.

Blair promises the minister that he will arrange to loan Bulgaria the necessary funds to finish the war, if she wins two great battles. Later, attending a ball with the Minister and *Masoya*, *Blair* is kidnapped by Tziganes (Gipsies) hired by *Hélène von Anhalt*. They hurry him toward the border. But, riding night and day through the mountains, *Masoya Vavaroff* overtakes the abductors. At her order—the order of The Lady of Czarigrad, Queen of the Tziganes—*Blair* is released. Together they return to Sofia where intensely patriotic demonstrations mark the outbreak of war. That night at the officers' club *Blair* is drawn into a duel with *General Gortcheff*, a notorious bully and a suitor of *Masoya*. *Blair* is victorious, but is censured by *Masoya* for not killing so dangerous a personal enemy. The American then leaves to join General Savoff's army at the front, accompanied by *Masoya's* great hound *Stoyan*, and carrying a tiny handkerchief, pressed into his hand as *Masoya* bade him farewell.

CHAPTER XIII

BROWN WAVES OF MEN

GUNS flamed and roared along a front of one hundred miles. In gigantic brown waves—forty thousand, fifty thousand, seventy-five thousand, one hundred thousand men at a time—Savoff threw his pawns into the fighting line, distributing them skilfully in blocks where they would do the most good, filling a hole there, pressing an advantage somewhere else, shuttling an army corps from wing to wing when his masterly eye told him the enemy's attention had been diverted, always forcing the Turks a little farther back.

And everything happened at such breakneck speed that nobody had a chance to rest. That was the secret of Savoff's plan.

"Keep them on the run," he dinned into the ears of his corps commanders. "Never let up on them! Harry them, drive them."

At dawn, on the 18th of October, the screen of cavalry vedettes stretching along the Bulgarian-Turkish frontier from Kostendil to the Black Sea was withdrawn, and the advance in force began. Standing upon a hill above the Adrianople Road, I watched the bayonet-tipped billows of Bulgarian infantry sweep past to the stamping of tens of thousands of boots and the roaring chorus of the "Sheumy Maritza."

Afar in the distance the muttering of cannon had already begun to subdue the rattle and roll of the rifle-fire, and now the sound of the marching voices deadened the noise of the cannon. It was tremendous, awe-inspiring. Even Stoyan, crouched on his haunches beside my horse, wagged his tail and looked up into my eyes with the manner of one who perceives the birth of great events.

Savoff's headquarters were in a schoolhouse just across the frontier on the Bulgarian side. There was a wireless station on the roof, and a dozen field-telephone and telegraph wires ran into the ground-floor rooms, which resounded with the endless, monotonous clicking of the Morse code. Panting motor-cars waited at the door to take the General and his staff wherever they might have cause to go.

Upstairs we sat at map-littered tables and read the crisply phrased bulletins that told of the brief action at Mustapha Pasha, the string of running fights which succeeded it, ending in the shadow of the walls of Adrianople, and the first mad, reckless charge on the iron belt of forts that was thrown back only after the far-stretching glacis had been marked with windrows of blood-stained corpses.

But this was as had been expected. On the bare chance of carrying the fortress by storm, the charge had been ordered. Had it succeeded Savoff would have been more surprised than his enemies. The trial was worth so many lives, however. In war, as in finance, the speculative element is never overlooked by the wise general.

Having convinced himself of the necessity of a regular blockade Savoff brought up two divisions of reservists—forty thousand men under Ivanoff, borrowed a division from the Servians, and intrenched them about the doomed city while he pushed on his first-line troops, who had become veterans in five breathless days of fighting.

Yet there was never a suggestion of sluggishness. Within two days after the advance began, headquarters had been moved forward after the battle-line to a little village in the Thracian hills thirty miles northeast of Adrianople.

In the meantime General Dimitrieff—under Savoff, commander of the Field Army which was destined to be the battering-ram to thrust back the Turkish Army of the East under Abdullah Pasha from its base at Kostendil—had led the right wing of his army into Central Macedonia, brushing the Turks out of Melnik, Seres and other important garrison towns, and marched to a point south of Adrianople on the left bank of the Maritza, where he joined forces with the left wing under Kutincheff.

Kutincheff had sprung a surprise upon the Turks by crossing the frontier under the shelter of the trackless Stranzha Dagh, dragging his cannon through the gloomy defiles and forests, hacking a path for sixty thousand men through a primeval wilderness until he came down upon the flank of the entrenched camp of Kirk Kilisse, against which Savoff had already directed a severe frontal attack.

For a time it seemed as if the very elements were fighting on the side of the Turks against the Bulgars. It rained. It rained as if the clouds were bursting and pouring down the last deluge upon earth.

Our troops slashed through seas of mud, lying in it on their bellies to fire through the driving rain that blurred sights and fogged the hills whence the Turkish batteries played over them. Artillery horses dropped dead of exhaustion in the traces, unable to pull the guns any farther; and the infantry threw aside their greatcoats and wheeled the pieces into position.

Nobody knew what had become of the commissariat trains; they were hopelessly mired miles in the rear. And two days before, food had been thrown by the wayside to lighten the carts, so that mules and oxen might be spared for the ammunition train. Soldiers can fight without food, but they can not fight without ammunition.

THROUGHOUT the first day of Kirk Kilisse I followed the bulletins with feverish interest in the council room of the General Staff at headquarters. Here Savoff sat, calm and imperturbable, surrounded by his advisers, scanning every word from the front, occasionally dictating some brief order that was taken into the Signal Corps room next door to be flashed to a commander miles away, beyond the cloud-draped hills. Standing on the doorstep you could catch the murmur of the cannonade, now faint, now startlingly clear. But inside the council room there was not the slightest indication of war.

Sabers were piled in a heap in the corner.

At intervals sandwiches were munched, with tin cups of sour country wine to wash them down.

Just after dark a motor car whirled up to the door and a drenched figure staggered into the room—the first unconventional character to appear upon the scene. By the light of the camp lanterns I identified him as Boris Kurtsky. His errand was quickly told while every officer privileged to be in the little room crowded close about him. He came from the advance guard of Kutincheff's left wing which had been delayed by the frightful weather in its passage of the Stranzha Dagh, but which, Boris said, was now coming up and would be in time to join in the renewed attack upon Kirk Kilisse in the morning.

While Savoff and his secretary were preparing orders for him to take back I secured a word with him. He was coated with mud from head to foot, and an orderly scraped him off with the edge of a saber as we talked.

"It's —— out there, old man," he said cheerily, with a wave of his hand toward the south. "Every blessed Mussulman in Thrace must be persuaded that Allah is fighting for him. I never thought we'd make it in time."

"Is it such a big battle?" I asked.

"Well, it's not so big a battle as the next one will be," answered Boris judicially. "But it is more important. By this battle we stand or fall. If we win it handily, Dan, we shall win the next one—somehow. This is the crucial test of strength."

"Then I'm off with you," said I. "I'm tired of this headquarters business, Boris. It may do for grave generals but I never could listen to cannon thirty miles away."

"You should have been a dragoon," grinned Boris. "It's all right so far as I'm concerned, but you must speak to the Chief."

When Savoff came over with his orders I asked him if he had any objections to my joining Kutincheff's staff in the field. A smile stole over his grim face as he shook his head, and he handed me a green telegraph blank.

"This just came for you over the private line from the Sofia Palace," he remarked, and turned away.

"Don't be rash," it said; and it was signed "M. V."

"You must be getting rather chummy with his Gracious Majesty, receiving confidential communications over his private wire," commented Boris. "But come on, you and your dog. We have thirty miles to do through swamps before midnight."

FORTUNATELY the road was quite level, or we should never have been able to make the run. As it was we ran through water and mud up to the hubs most of the way, and were twice stalled. It took us nearly four hours to go the thirty miles, and it was one o'clock instead of midnight when we reached the far rear of the Bulgarian position, plotted out in the rainswept darkness by thousands of flickering camp-fires.

Most of the time we slept, as Boris kindly informed me that there would be little chance for relaxation once we were back in camp. We passed by seemingly endless lines of sentinels and came finally to a farmstead in a hollow before which blazed an immense fire, and all around which were picketed lines of blanketed horses.

"Headquarters," said Boris briefly. "Come in."

I followed him into a bare, earthen-floored room, the kitchen and living-room of the house. Nearly every inch of floor space was occupied by sleeping officers, over whom we walked gingerly to an inner door on which Boris knocked. A gruff voice bade him enter, and I made myself comfortable upon an end of a table. I had not meant to sleep; but worn out by the exhaustion of the motor-ride, coming after several days of unrelaxed excitement, I dozed, and awoke only with the general movement an hour and a half later.

An orderly brought me a cup of coffee, and presently Boris came in. He had deep black circles of fatigue under his eyes, but they glowed with the feverish energy that I saw depicted upon every side of me.

"You are to go with the general," he whispered. "Come on. I've pilfered a mount for you."

Outside, the darkness had turned to a grayness and the rain had ceased. We set out, a dreary procession of men and beasts, heads bent before a cutting wind out of the southeast. Ahead of us sounded the crackle of rifle fire, with now and then the solitary boom of a cannon. But as we rode on, the firing increased in volume and the big guns commenced to roar a bass accompaniment to the staccato rattle of small arms.

Boris, whose cavalrymen were out of work for the day, rode up beside me and pointed out the points of importance on the battle-field. Far off, where the white smoke was rising, was the salient Turkish position which must first be carried if the day's work were to begin in thorough fashion.

"Over there to the right," he went on, "a Sofia regiment—I think it was the First—yesterday captured a battery of artillery, and the men refused to retreat, even when ordered to, without the guns. They brought off three, but the others were stuck so badly in the mud that they finally left them."

As he spoke a straggling cheer went up from the members of the staff. Fingers were pointed, binoculars raised; and following the outstretched arms I saw a long, undulating brown wave of men that sprang up out of the ground and raced forward toward the feathery smoke that hovered over the Turkish guns.

Like a wave of the sea, it crested before it broke and pitched forward flat upon the ground. Behind it another wave had risen up and billowed forward. Behind that came another and another. And before the last of the new waves had broken the first one raised its crest and rolled forward again.

These waves of men were at least three miles long. Over them the shrapnel shells burst with clouds of sickly yellow smoke, from which rained a hail of steel pellets. They were swept by thousands of Mausers at easy rifle range. But they went on remorselessly, without any appreciable check, exactly as the waves of the sea roll on. In every part of the field similar scenes were being played. The din of firing had increased to a crescendo pitch that was deafening.

Kutincheff had brought up all his reserve artillery and was rapidly silencing the enemy's guns by a searching fire that simply blasted out of existence whole sections at a time and made so much easier the attack of his infantry. Also, Boris told me, a vigorous flank attack was being pushed home on our left.

"Watch!" he said. "You will see them break presently. They can not hold much longer. Ah, see! See! Over there. To the right. That is the Sofia Brigade, now. See them! See them! They are in the intrenchments."

All over the field the Bulgarian infantry was sweeping forward in its peculiar billowing formation which lends itself so readily to the bayonet charge. They went forward by battalions, one after another, the second covering the first; and once they had started there seemed no stopping them. Boris shut his binoculars and snapped them back into their case.

"It's over, Dan," he said. "We shall be in Kirk Kilisse by noon."

To be exact, it was half past twelve when we rode into the outskirts of the town, and while hand-to-hand fighting was still in progress in the vineyards of the eastern suburbs, the Bulgars cleaned out the Turks there in a warm quarter of an hour.

It was three o'clock when Gen. Savoff's motor chugged through the mud into the principal street of Kirk Kilisse and stopped in front of the tobacco-warehouse that had been turned into a temporary headquarters. As it chanced, I was the first person he spied in a group outside the door; and he came straight up to me, a faint smile crinkling the skin over his high cheekbones, and his hand outstretched.

"Well, Mr. Blair," he said, "we have performed one half of our contract with you. It is one week since the declaration of war, and we have won a battle. In another week, I think, we shall have won the second."

"You can have a month, General," I answered.

"A week will be sufficient," he answered carelessly, and passed on into the house with his brilliant staff around him.

I turned from him to look up the street at a brown column of men marching at ease. They were coming in from the vineyards where the fighting was just ended. They marched like men who dream or walk in their sleep, dragging their feet along as if they were weighted with lead. But suddenly a sergeant on the flank of a company commenced the "Sheumy Maritza."

A STREAM of fire seemed to shoot through the veins of these weary, worn-out men. Their heads went up, their arms swung in unison, they stamped their feet firmly on the ground. And company by company they joined in the stirring refrain. Again they flowed along with that billowy, rhythmic motion, hinting of the irresistible, like a mountain torrent heedless of all opposition.

"On, on; Czarigrad is ours!
One, two, three!
March the infantry!"

And I remembered that if this song was a song of the land and of a mighty river that was the mother of the land, it was also a song of the great city Czarigrad—as the Slavs call Constantinople—the City of the Emperor, after which Masoya's strange castle was named. And if these men were fighting for the land, they were also fighting for her—though they did not know it.

The vicarious exultation which had uplifted me was turned to sorrow and morbid self-pity. An icy hand clutched at my heart. Victory for Bulgaria—such grand, soul-stirring victory—meant victory for Masoya; meant, in all probability, the realization of her dreams of empire, meant—— What did it mean for me? My mind refused to grapple with the problem.

CHAPTER XIV

SOLD AND DELIVERED

AFTER Kirk Kilisse the right and left wings of Savoff's army were joined together south of Adrianople, the gaps in the ranks caused by the initial fighting were filled up with reservists, and they marched on, two hundred thousand strong. The Turks, who had expected the Bulgars to waste their time in futile assaults upon the *enceinte* of Adrianople, hastily assumed a position on an irregular line of thirty miles, from the railway station of Eski Baba in the Maritza Valley through the village of Lüle Burgas to Bunar Hissar, barring the line of advance along the railroad to Constantinople.

Boris Kurtsky and his advance-guard cavalry came into touch with the Turkish outposts in front of Lüle Burgas on the 28th, only four days after the fall of Kirk Kilisse. By the following day the engagement was general along the right of our line, but many of the columns of the left wing were delayed in assuming position by the atrocious roads. For a time the Turks made considerable headway in this part of the field, but Kutincheff brought up his troops by forced marches and gradually compelled the enemy to retire.

On the second day the Bulgars developed their attack in earnest all along the line. They rained shrapnel upon the Turkish lines, making full use of the superior accuracy of their artillerymen, and captured several positions at the point of the bayonet. The Turkish line, which had been resilient as a steel blade on the first day, became noticeably soft and spongy in spots. At intervals it would give under Savoff's savage thrusts. Then by heavy drafts on their reserves from other parts of the line the Turks would recover the ground they had lost, only to give back in some other quarter.

"In twenty-four hours we shall have completed our share of the bargain, Mr. Blair," announced Gen. Savoff that night. "Yesterday we tried them out. Today we have been shaking their *morale.* Tomorrow we shall attack in earnest. They have already been forced out of Eski Baba. In the morning we shall flank Lüle Burgas and roll up their left wing. I do not think many will escape."

The staff officers who thronged the woodcutter's hut which had become headquarters for the night nodded their heads; but Boris Kurtsky, who had accompanied me to the conference, gave a grunt of displeasure as we sought the outside air.

"All that he said was Gospel up to the last," he commented. "But I think a good many will escape. In fact, all who aren't killed ought to get away."

"Why so?" I asked.

"We have no cavalry left worthy of the name," he replied succinctly. "They're used up; played out. Their Excellencies the generals worked us to death in the first week. The result is that they are going to lose the chance of gobbling up pretty near the whole Turkish army, and galloping on the heels of the few survivors into Constantinople."

"Well, you'll have to make the best of it," I said.

"Right," he answered. "Good night."

And he melted into the night. It was the last I saw of Boris Kurtsky in many a long month. But this is trotting ahead of my story.

In the morning it all turned out as Savoff had predicted. Torn to pieces by the terribly accurate fire of the Bulgarian field artillery, the Turkish infantry quivered under the threat of the bayonet, and half the time fled without waiting for their enemies to come to close quarters. Lüle Burgas was taken; the heights above it, commanding the Turkish position in flank for miles, were occupied by the Bulgarian batteries; the whole Turkish left wing was crumpled up, annihilated by battalions.

A desperate frontal attack upon the center had caused it to give also and to pivot around to the southward, so that instead of facing northwest it faced directly west to meet Dimitrieff's troops who were swarming through Lüle Burgas to force the issue. Only the Turkish right, Mahmoud Mukhtar's corps, stood comparatively firm against Kutincheff's most vicious attacks.

But as the afternoon wore on and the Bulgars' attacks increased in violence and their artillery followed up the retreating Turks, the retirement of the left and center gradually became a rout, mainly without order or system. Unsupported by the rest of the army, the right wing was compelled to give ground, too; and so, all along the line, the Turks began to disintegrate and flee. Entire regiments were rounded up in some instances and forced to surrender, but exactly as Boris had predicted, his scant force of a thousand sabers was barely able to harry the retreat, let alone cut off considerable bodies of prisoners.

THAT night Savoff sent for me to come to him in the village *khan* at Lüle Burgas, to which headquarters had been removed. With him were Dimitrieff, a short, stout man with an aggressive face; Kutincheff, tall, lean, taciturn; and several other generals I do not remember, besides my erstwhile antagonist, Constantine Gortcheff. I bowed to him, as I did to all the others present, and he returned the salutation—urbanely, to be sure, but with a vicious glint in his eye that became positively malevolent when he saw Stoyan stalking at my heels.

"Mr. Blair," Savoff began without any preliminaries, "I have asked you to call this evening by the advice of the council of war, which has decided that the battle we have won today may be said to have wiped out all Turkish opposition to us in Thrace. There is no body of troops between here and Constantinople capable of delaying the advance of my army. We have fulfilled the conditions you laid down as necessarily precedent to a loan, and I now call upon you to state whether you are prepared to make good your offer."

"I am satisfied, General Savoff," I replied. "You are at liberty to inform the Turkish plenipotentiaries, as soon as you meet them, that I stand ready to place a loan of twenty-five million dollars in gold at the disposal of your government."

"I think this practically ends the campaign, gentlemen," said Savoff. "With the sinews of war guaranteed to us, we can claim to have won possibly the shortest and most decisive campaign in history."

They all murmured assent. I do not suppose there was one of us—except Gortcheff—who doubted that peace would be signed inside of two weeks. Our allies had carried all before them. There were no Turkish armies left in the open field. And the three or four fortresses which still held out must surrender when all chance of succor was taken from them.

When an orderly brought in an oil can of rough country wine, we filled tin cups and drank confidently to the final victory that seemed to us already won. Afterward I remembered that Gortcheff had leered over the edge of his cup as he drank. Strange how little things impress themselves upon one's memory.

Since those days Western military men have asked me why the Bulgars were so unaccountably lax in following up the advantages they gained at Kirk Kilisse and Lüle Burgas. There is no doubt that had they been able to press hard upon the rear of the flying Turks they could have captured the Tchataldja Lines without serious opposition.

But for more than two weeks the Bulgarian infantry had been working under superhuman pressure; they had fought and won two pitched battles and a dozen smaller actions and skirmishes, marching all the time at top speed over roads that were quagmires. Half the time they marched through rain. During the last week they moved at such a rate that it was impossible for their transport to keep up with them. We all went hungry, officers and generals as well as privates.

After Lüle Burgas the infantry lay down and panted like tired dogs. It was two days before they could be pushed forward, and the delay was fatal to Savoff's hopes of entering Constantinople on the heels of the enemy. The artillery was in even worse shape, for under such abnormal conditions horses suffered more than human beings.

Savoff did the best he could. He pushed his infantry forward as fast as the men were rested. Such cavalry as he had he used for scouring the country ahead of him and for seizing the Marmora ports. Bands of Macedonian irregulars, the *chetniks* who had warred on the Turks all their lives without intermission, were flung forward to supplement the cavalry, covering the Bulgarian front with a network of patrols and skirmishers. These organizations carried on a warfare of their own against similar bodies of Turkish cavalry and *bashi-bazouks* in the interval before the army could prosecute its march on Constantinople.

Many of the participants in this warfare were more than half brigands, men of no individual honor or patriotism, who were attracted to the work by the chances of plunder. So far as was possible Savoff and his generals kept a check upon those under their control, and Savoff delegated Gortcheff to act in supreme command of irregular auxiliaries. But actually they did pretty much as they pleased.

I had confidently looked forward to seeing a little outpost work with Boris, but when several days passed and no invitation came to me at headquarters—which had been moved again to Eradli, a station on the railroad from Adrianople to Constantinople—I decided that Boris had forgotten me or else considered the work too dangerous and took this means of keeping me out of it. It was frightfully dull at Eradli, where every one was occupied in solving problems in transport and getting the railroad working again.

Stoyan and I were reduced to taking rambles together through the neighboring country. I was returning from such a ride late one afternoon when a swart, thick-set man, who looked uncommonly like a Tartar but wore the costume of the Macedonian Free Companions, approached me on the outskirts of the headquarters camp.

"Are you the American, *Guspodine* Blair?" he asked in guttural Bulgarian.

His voice had an alien tang to it, and I glanced sharply at him.

"Yes," I said.

"I have a letter for you from Colonel Kurtsky," he went on, and fished out a soiled piece of paper from the folds of his waist sash.

It was so filthy and creased that it was all I could do to make out the words written over it in lead pencil. It read:

DEAR BLAIR:
Come with the bearer and I will show you some fun. He will pass you through the lines.
KURTSKY.

"Where is Colonel Kurtsky?" I asked.

"When I left him he was at Sveti-Tevjan, fifteen miles beyond Tchorlu," the fellow answered. "But he may not be there at this moment."

"Why not?" I demanded sharply. For some unaccountable reason I did not like him.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Out there we do not stay still very long just now, *guspodine*. We keep moving."

This was true enough, and I was half ashamed.

"All right," I said. "I'll be with you in ten minutes."

I STAYED only to pack a few things in saddle-bags, scribble a short note to Savoff, and stuff some spare cartridge-clips for my pistol into a pocket. The man was waiting outside when I returned, keeping a wary eye on Stoyan who, on his part, did not show any particular favor for our guide.

We rode out past the camp sentries, and after traversing the line of the railroad for seven or eight miles struck off to the southeast along a bridle path which my guide said was a short-cut. About nine o'clock we came to a large village, absolutely deserted, and the man signified that we should halt here for supper and to give the horses a rest. He seemed to know his way about, and went straight to the village inn which stood gaping and empty.

An hour later we rode on again under the light of the stars. It was a little after midnight when we descried a dim patch of forest ahead of us to the left. The road wound across a shallow brook and plunged into the heart of this tract. Stoyan, loping at my side, pricked up his ears as we came to the water and drew back his lips with a low growl that I recognized for a warning.

"Look here, I don't like this place," I exclaimed. "The dog smells something."

"Doubtless my companions," said my

guide. "Did the *guspodine* think we could ride much farther alone? This is a bad country. There are many Turkish raiding-parties abroad, and it is only safe to travel in large bands."

"So?" said I. "But where do we find Colonel Kurtsky?"

"That I can not say definitely, *guspodine*," the fellow answered patiently. "He should meet us somewhere along this road beyond the forest and before morning."

We were already among the trees, and suddenly Stoyan gave a sharp growl and crowded over against my horse. All about us vague shapes had detached themselves from the shadows. Involuntarily my hand sought my pistol. But the muzzle of a Mannlicher carbine was jammed into my chest, and the voice of the guide, now hoarse and menacing, muttered:

"None of that, *guspodine!* Here, one of you," he called to the shadows. "Come over here and search this eaglet."

Several started to obey, and Stoyan, who had been moving uneasily, reared up and flung himself at the nearest of them with a wolfish *grr-rr-rr* of savage rage. The man he attacked gave a startled cry of alarm and fell back. His cries were repeated. For a moment panic threatened as Stoyan fought for a grip on the man's leg. Then a horseman draped in a long cloak, with a flat officer's cap on his head, pushed into the midst of the mêlée.

"St. Ivan!" he snarled. "It's only a dog. Shoot him, you sheep, shoot him!"

But the men about me were afraid of shooting for fear of hitting each other, and I seized the opportunity to whistle to Stoyan.

"Stoyan, Stoyan!" I called. "To heel, dog! Follow on, follow on!"

This was an order Masoya had taught him and meant that he should trail her at a distance. The dog shook himself free of the press, slipped under a horse's belly and glided into the shadows of the trees.

My captors wasted no time in pursuit. They seemed to be glad to get off so easily, and closed about me in a solid mass, trotting through the forest in a direction I calculated to be diagonally opposite to that we had been following. How long we rode I don't know. I was very tired, and they bound my hands behind me which made it difficult for me to ride easily. The false dawn was whitening the east, however, when we rode into a clearing in the center of which blazed a camp-fire, around which were grouped a troop of cavalry who wore the fez.

I was in the hands of the Philistines with a vengeance.

Our cavalcade halted at one side of the clearing, while the man in the uniform-cap rode forward and met two others, one of them obviously an officer by the smart tilt of his fez and his Arab mount, the other a European in riding-clothes. They chatted for a few minutes, and the man who looked like a European handed a slip of paper to the chief of the band that had captured me. They laughed over something, and then the officer turned in his saddle and whistled to two of his men who rode forward and placed themselves on either side of me.

Then the man in the uniform-cap rode back and took a long look at me over the fold of his heavy cape which covered all of his face but his eyes—fierce, bleared eyes that looked oddly familiar to me.

"*Os bogu, Guspodine* Blair," he said mockingly. "I have placed you where you will no longer be a factor of international importance. In fact, I am consigning you to a friend who seems to be as interested in your welfare as I am, myself. *Os bogu.*"

He was Gortcheff. A cold shiver of dread passed over me as he laughed again and rode on, the motley band of *komitajis* following two by two at his heels.

I had never dreamed the man was capable of anything like this. The full meaning of it was not even clear to my mind at first. It was too shocking——

"Good morning, Mr. Blair," said a voice in English, with a strong German accent, at my elbow.

CHAPTER XV

THE CHOLERA STOCKADE AT SAN STEFANO

BUT this time I was not startled. I should have known those rasping tones anywhere, even without the Teutonic burr.

"You believe in perseverance, don't you, von Griffenstein?" I asked as I turned with some effort in my saddle and smiled to see his disgust that I failed to show concern.

The man in riding-clothes was the Austrian spy.

"You didn't expect to end your ride as my guest, did you?" he replied.

"Not exactly," I said.

"Didn't you think you had beaten us when you persuaded the old man in Sofia to declare war?" he persisted.

"I never think much about scoundrels of your type, von Griffenstein," I returned pleasantly. "By the way, where is Hélène von Anhalt? I smell her hand in this."

His lips drew back in an ugly snarl, exactly like Stoyan's a few minutes before.

"Never mind about that," he said curtly. "Have you got any papers on you? I shall have to search you, anyhow, but it may simplify matters——"

"Go as far as you like," I urged. "My arms are bound, and those merry banditti of Gortcheff's got my gun which was the only thing I had worth anything. But go ahead."

He gave me a suspicious glance.

"I believe I will," he answered. "You never can tell about you —— Yankees."

It did not take him long to make sure that I had told the truth, and he rode off with a short command in Turkish to the troopers who stood guard over me. They linked my bridle with theirs and trotted me into the midst of their comrades. Five minutes later we were cantering along a rough wood-road that led through the forest in a southeasterly direction toward Tchataldja.

Von Griffenstein and the lieutenant in command rode ahead. I was packed close in the center of the cavalcade, surrounded by flat-featured Tartars and desert Arabs.

We rode without a break until about nine o'clock, by which time I was so weary that I could scarcely keep my seat. We had left the forest behind us and were traversing an open, rolling country, dotted with occasional villages and farmsteads, from not one of which rose the column of smoke that is the sign of human occupation. It was at one of these villages, forlorn and desolate, yet seemingly unharmed, that we stopped for breakfast. My guards untied my hands, helped me to dismount and let me stretch out on the ground.

There was not a bone or muscle in my body that did not ache, but when the Austrian strolled over to me I sat up and pretended to feel perfectly fit. He was the low-bred, mongrel kind of cur who gloats over an enemy's sufferings.

"We have been talking about you," he said, flicking the ash off his cigarette. "He"—with a nod toward the officer in command of the troop—"seems to think we should take you before Abdullah Pasha."

"Yes?"

"But as a matter of fact, you know," he continued, "we're not going to do anything of the kind."

"You're going to get yourself into a heap of trouble as soon as this is found out," I returned. "I'm an American citizen and a non-combatant, and the American Ambassador at Constantinople will make things interesting for you and your gang when he hears of it."

He smiled deprecatingly, in the most villainous, nauseating way I have ever seen a man smile.

"Ah, but he won't hear of it," he replied with a chuckle. "We shall take care of that, never fear."

"What do you mean?" I asked curiously.

"My dear sir," he responded, "we are perfectly acquainted with the reasons for your presence with the Bulgarian army. Do you suppose we are going to permit you to draw any attention to yourself now that we have you in our power? Mr. Blair, you are dead. You died last night. We shall place you in a good safe place where you will stay dead—oh, quite some time. Yes, quite some time!"

So this was their plan—and not a bad one, either. I looked at the man with respect which was somewhat diminished by the instant conclusion that Hélène von Anhalt, not this waster before me, was responsible for its inception.

"Of course," von Griffenstein added, "your Bulgar friends will cry aloud that you are a prisoner, that the report of your death is false. But we shall take care—or, rather, our good friend Gortcheff—will take care that the report is a most circumstantial one; and there will be no trace of you in any of the prisons of Constantinople."

I regarded him with mock admiration.

"That's the first really clever trick your gang has played yet, von Griffenstein," I said. "What would you do without that girl's brain?"

He flushed.

"Oh, she doesn't do everything," he answered.

"Faugh!" said I. "She's the only one among you with reasoning intelligence."

"Well, she isn't responsible for this particular idea," he growled. "Or at any rate, I've improved considerably upon the original proposition."

And laughing boisterously at some hidden joke which gave him much satisfaction, he betook himself off.

At noon we started again. Several times we hid in clumps of woodland when distant bodies of men were seen on the horizon.

Along toward evening we began to meet Turkish patrols and cavalry posts, and at sunset we glimpsed the long motionless line of sentinels, five or six hundred yardsa part, that stretched from the shore of Marmora across the peninsula which is the termination of Europe, to the Black Sea.

That night we camped in the village of Tchataldja, just outside the famous lines, which was held in force as an advance post by a brigade of Syrians. In the morning we rode through the lines of fortifications, where thousands of men were toiling with shovel and pick, building new redoubts, digging connecting lines of trenches woven together by a network of traverses, and mounting big guns many of which evidently had been taken from the useless men-of-war blockaded in the Marmora by the Greek fleet. I mentally registered a note that it would be no easy task to carry these lines.

Von Griffenstein must have appreciated my observations, for presently he dropped back to my side.

"Look your fill, Blair," he said sneeringly. "You'll have no chance to tell your friends about it."

"I'm not a spy," I answered—a bit rudely, I am afraid. Anyhow, he rode ahead with a curse.

ANY thought I ever entertained of escaping was abandoned in the course of that morning's ride. The country swarmed with soldiers. They bobbed up everywhere, and sentries and patrols were scattered thickly along the roads. At the same time, I kept wondering what had become of Stoyan. Since he leaped clear of the mêlée in the forest the night before I had not caught a single glimpse of the hound, although I had a feeling that he was always somewhere near.

It would have been comparatively easy for him to trail us through the broken country up to the Lines, but how was he going to pass that barrier of men and earthen walls without being seen and captured? So large a dog would attract attention, and some shrewd *askar* might be relied upon to perceive the possibilities of a sale in the Pera quarter where foolish Unbelievers paid equally foolish prices for unusual animals.

We rode southward, skirting the shore of the Bay of Buyuk Chekmeje, across the tongue of land intervening between it and Kuchuk Chekmeje, picked up the railroad at the head of the second body of water and followed that until we struck the road which enters Stamboul by way of San Stefano, where the victorious Russians halted in '78 and dictated terms of peace at the muzzles of their cannon.

This was as short a road to the capital as any other, and it did not excite any uneasiness in me. I was glad to have the ride draw to an end, for no matter what disposition was to be made of me, I could not conceive of one which would not be preferable to the company of von Griffenstein.

So I was thinking as we halted on the brow of a low hill above San Stefano, and somewhat to my surprise the young lieutenant in command rode back to where I was placed in the center of the column.

"I wish to tell you, sir," he said in French, "that my disposition of you is not made on my own responsibility. My instructions place me absolutely under the orders of this man who is with me."

He was a smart-looking youngster of the Young Turk stamp, and in those few words he made it distressingly plain that something mighty unpleasant was going to happen to me. But his interest could not have been very personal, for he turned his back as soon as he had spoken, muttered an order to the sergeant commanding the squad that surrounded me and returned to the head of the column.

Without a word to me the sergeant took the bridle of my horse, growled at the men in his squad and led us off across fields toward the hills beyond San Stefano. The rest of the troop stood motionless on the hilltop, most of them looking out over the Marmora at a squatty little cargo-boat that was wallowing toward Silivri, probably bound to pick up refugees. Not even von Griffenstein watched my exit. He was engaged in a heated discussion with the Turkish officer, in which, judging by his flurried gestures and the other man's cold manner, he was coming off second best.

In ten minutes we had dropped into a gulley and they were out of sight. Presently we emerged upon another hillside and looked down at one of the most awful, desolate, appalling scenes it has ever been my misfortune to witness.

WE STOOD on the brink of a wide, shallow valley in the hills. Beyond them to the south towered the minarets and house-roofs of San Stefano and the European Summer colony. And all around the valley extended a line of sentinels, leaning on their rifles.

Inside this line of men was a line of fence, not high—simply a roughly boarded palisade any boy could have torn apart in ten minutes, or shinnied over in two. And this palisade was full of men, a few of whom sat and walked about, but most of whom lay still on the ground. Here and there a small shelter-tent was pitched, and a few fires sent wisps of smoke into the air. But for the most part the scene was one of terrible lifelessness and despair.

Who could these men be? Even at this distance I could see their fezes. They were not Christian prisoners. They were Turks, soldiers of the same army that my captors belonged to. Why were they penned and guarded in this quiet valley? I turned to the sergeant with the question written plain on my face.

"The cholera-stockade," he answered simply.

I shuddered. It was the first time any of them had spoken to me, which obviously meant that they already regarded me as a dead man. The sergeant corroborated this impression.

"You must have powerful enemies, *effendi*," he went on. "They have given you the worst death Allah bestows." He spat viciously on the ground. "*Kismet!*" he added as an afterthought.

In silence we rode on down the slope of the valley toward the line of statuesque sentinels and the hell inside the fragile fence. My brain reeled under the shock. In the breathing spell that followed Lüle Burgas we at Bulgarian headquarters had heard rumors of a great cholera epidemic among the Asiatic battalions of the Turkish army.

To any one with a knowledge of the lack of sanitation in Turkish camps this seemed plausible enough. But cut off as we were in the hills of Thrace, devoting every energy to the completion of the task ahead, nobody had paid much attention to the rumors save to catalogue them as another factor to our advantage.

Now the reality of the story was brought before me with the raw vividness of a motion-picture film. In face of such a catastrophe the Turks had never thought of the aids of modern science. With the typical fatalism of the Oriental they had decreed that the sick should be herded off by themselves to die without contaminating the well. As for the comfort of the sufferers, or any effort to save them from death, such things were never thought of. Men sickened and were carted off to the cholera-pen by thousands, but the Turkish generals gave no heed to them. There were plenty of more soldiers to be brought out of teeming Asia Minor.

It was this side of the dreadful picture that gripped my mind until we had reached the flimsy shack by the gate that served as guardhouse. I never thought of my personal interest in it after the sergeant's first words. It seemed impossible, too bestially inhuman. Things like that weren't done in the twentieth century.

To torture a man was one thing, but—— My brain, numbed by the sheer horror of the dawning idea, refused to grapple with it. No, no! I told myself. It could not be. It was a fiendish practical joke. Savages poisoned their enemies' wells, I had heard; but surely the most bloodthirsty and vindictive of men would not thrust an enemy into a cholera-stockade.

Yet I underestimated von Griffenstein's savageness, just as I had underestimated his inventiveness. For, after the sergeant had presented a written order to the officer on duty in the guard-house, I was pulled down off my horse, feebly resisting all the while, and shoved inside the gate. The officer looked at me pityingly, but not a word was said during the operation. The gate jarred shut behind me and I stood within the enclosure—cowering, for the first time in my life demoralized by fear.

At first I was afraid to look around me. When I finally mustered up sufficient courage I found that I stood in a comparatively open space. The nearest body was fully twenty yards away, and there were no living men within twice that distance. Returning reason warned me that my only chance of safety lay in keeping away from the unfortunates inside the stockade, and I set out to find some corner where I might feel safe from contact. I started along the line of the fence, but I had not taken a dozen steps when a sentinel hailed me with a hoarse shout and raised his gun threateningly. I was trespassing on the dead-line.

The only course left for me was straight through the inferno. Bodies lay on every side, and there were hundreds of men dying. But even more distressing was the sight of men in the earliest stages of the disease who were able to move around and fully appreciate their plight. The shrieks and lamentations of some of these poor fellows ring in my ears today. But for the most part the sufferers were silent, lying or sitting on the ground with true Mohammedan stoicism.

A few tents had been erected when the stockade was first established, and these were occupied by men who were well enough to fight for them and keep possession. Afterward, I believe, the foreign residents of Constantinople formed an emergency corps of doctors and nurses that established headquarters in the stockade; but at this time there was no medical attention whatsoever, and men came in to die, with never a chance of recovery.

As I passed through the nightmare scenes of that festering place I was pursued by a chorus of groans, screams and whispered appeals. They could see that I was able to walk, and they pleaded with me to carry them from the places where they lay to some other spots on which the sun was now shining or next to the last resting-place of a friend or brother. Frequently I was asked for food, for the Turkish authorities made scant effort to serve rations to dying men when they had more well men on their hands than they could feed.

IN THE end, after walking about for three quarters of an hour, I found a nook in the corner of the palisade where the sun was still shining, and some distance away from any of the other inmates. Here I sat down and tried to plan a way out of my predicament. But every plan was discarded as soon as I chanced to look up at the line of motionless sentinels that ringed the fence. Whatever doubts I may have had of their vigilance were shattered, shortly before dusk, when a man broke loose from a group that had just been thrust through the gate.

He ran in an uneven, zigzag course toward the stockade and clawed at it with his hands as he strove unsteadily to climb one of the posts. The nearest sentinel called to him several times, and when the man persisted raised his rifle, aimed and fired. The man crumpled up in a heap under the shadow of the fence.

For a while I was very doleful and despondent, a frame of mind from which I was released by the sight of a wheelbarrow-load of bread, surrounded by armed soldiers. I secured a loaf from one of the guards and retired to my corner to eat, thinking myself lucky to get any food. On the contrary, the dry black bread induced intense thirst, and to my consternation I realized that in the stockade there could be no water that would be safe to drink.

I made the best of things, however, and arranged myself a bed under the branches of some low bushes which partially protected me from the keen night air. I was very cold, and slept little. My thirst kept me awake, too. It seemed to me as if my swollen tongue must stop up my throat.

After several hours, though, I must have succumbed to the fatigue that racked my body. I lapsed into a state of semi-consciousness from which I was abruptly aroused by feeling something rough and wet drawn across my face. The first coherent thought that shot through my brain was that one of my unfortunate companions in this den of misery must have crept to my side in search of warmth, and I own that murder was in my heart.

But as I sat up I brushed against a cold damp muzzle, and an eager whine came out of the darkness close to my ear. Hardly daring to believe my senses, I reached over and clutched the rough hide of Stoyan. The dog crept nearer to me and laid his head on my knee, as if to tell me how glad he was to see me. Yet he made no noise that could have carried a dozen feet. He knew, as well as any man could have known, the dangers of his position. Indeed, how he could ever have passed the farthest outposts before Tchataldja, let alone the rigid guard maintained along the lines, I have never been able to understand.

Then for the first time since the gate of this horrible place closed on me a faint ray of hope warmed my heart. Masoya had known what she was doing when she sent the great hound with me. He might yet be the means of securing my release. I fumbled in my pockets for pencil and paper, but the several searchings to which I had been subjected had denuded me of everything except an indelible pencil and the tiny handkerchief that Masoya had given me for exactly such a purpose.

The moon was behind a bank of clouds, but a faint silvery light diminished the darkness so that I was able to scrawl slowly across the white surface of the handkerchief, spread on my knee, these words:

> Cholera camp. San Stefano. Help.
>
> DAN.

Then I folded the handkerchief and tied it inside Stoyan's collar, under his shaggy throat. He watched me attentively while I worked, and when the handkerchief had been adjusted, I took his head in my hands and looked into his big luminous eyes.

"Take it to Masoya," I ordered, patting the handkerchief. "Find your mistress, Stoyan. Go."

He whined and licked my hand, and five seconds later I could not have told in which direction he had disappeared. He padded off into the shadows silently as a wolf.

CHAPTER XVI

THE HEART OF AN ADVENTURESS

"WATER! For the love of Allah! Water!"

This was the cry with which the stockade greeted the morning sun. From every part of the vale of misery the cry rose to heaven —and was not heard. Fetid wrecks of men staggered toward the dead-line with hands outstretched, only to be repulsed by the hoarse warnings of the sentinels.

A little water, only a little water, they begged. It was not much to ask. In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful—— But Allah does not breed compassion or mercy in the breasts of men who believe in him, and the most touching pleas were ignored.

By this time I was near mad with thirst myself. My tongue, thick and blackened, projected between my cracked lips. I looked at the chunk of black bread I had saved from my supper and knew that it would be hopeless even to try to force it down my throat. I must have water. Heavens! How I longed for water—a drop, a trickle, barely enough to moisten my fevered lips.

The temporary exhilaration caused by the knowledge that Stoyan would carry my message to Masoya was speedily dissipated by this suffering. Again I was overcome with the feeling of despondency that had almost prompted me to throw myself at the stockade the night before and force the sentinels to fire on me. But the lapse into light-headedness which this brought about was succeeded by a feeling of desperation. No, I would not commit suicide, I resolved. But I would leave no stone unturned to compel my comfort. I would make the guards give me food and drink.

So I set out, unsteadily, but determined, toward the gate. Fortunately there was no rule against an inmate approaching the gate after due signal, and I soon found myself looking through the bars at the officer who had admitted me the day before—a dignified old Turk with a full gray beard, one of the Hamidian officers who had been relegated to the background of affairs when the Young Turks came into power.

"Well?" he asked, not unkindly.

I pointed to my tongue.

"Water!" I gasped, barely able to articulate with my stiffened lips.

He shrugged his shoulders, although there was a glint of compassion in his eyes, I thought.

"I can not help that, friend," he returned. "A greater than I has ordered the dispositions to be made with cholera patients, and it is strictly ordered that there shall be no intercourse between the patients and the guards. Later, I have no doubt that the commissariat will send water and bread. But in the meantime there are strong men to be fed, and the dying must wait."

"But I am not dying," I gasped. "I have no cholera."

He looked at me keenly.

"Will you swear that by Allah and the Prophet's beard?" he demanded.

"I am not a Moslem," I answered, "but I will swear by my own God."

"Oh, the God of the Christians?" he said, more readily.

"Yes."

"Well, if you are a Frank your word will be enough," he said. "Franks keep their word, I have found."

He looked around him. Nobody was in sight. Even the sentinel regularly stationed before the gate had marched around one corner of the guardhouse.

"Here, take this," he said. And he passed a canteen through the bars to me.

I let the water trickle luxuriously over my swollen tongue and down my parched throat, but I had sufficient presence of mind to be sparing of it, knowing the evils of over-indulgence when in such a condition. It was with great reluctance, though, that I handed the canteen back to him. But he would not take it.

"No, keep it," he urged. "I do not know who you are, Frank, but I do know that the man who sent you here is an unclean dog, be he Moslem or Christian; and I will do what I can for you. But you must be careful not to mix with others in the stockade."

"I will be careful," I promised.

"And come to me here this evening toward dusk," he concluded, "and I will give you food and more water."

He broke off hurriedly as the sentinel appeared around the corner of the guardhouse, and I slunk away with my treasured water hidden under the ragged remnants of what had once been a presentable riding-suit. Once more my spirits were buoyed up. It would not be so easy for von Griffenstein to make away with me as he had thought. If I could last a week or two in this inferno I might yet hope for release, in consequence of the turmoil which Masoy[illegible] and her friends would raise in the European press as soon as they heard of the fiendish trick that had been played on me.

So that day dragged by. Ruthlessly I repelled all advances from the sufferers about me, attracted by my superior strength. For if I ever hoped to escape the scourge this was the only thing to do.

Selfish it might be, lacking even in Christian charity. Yet what good would I do any one by succumbing to the disease? And without conceit, I knew that my safety was vital to the men who were sweeping toward Tchataldja, hoping to reap full benefit for the vast sacrifices they had already made.

Men died very fast in the stockade. But as fast as they died new parties of sufferers were marched in to take their places. If anything, the stockade was more crowded when night came. The efforts to bury the dead were pitifully inadequate. A squad of infantrymen, shivering with fear, during the afternoon dug a shallow pit on the lower slope of a hill, in which the bodies were laid in rows under two feet of earth.

AFTER the burying-squad had marched out I stole up to the bars of the gate and whistled low to attract the attention of the old Hamidian. He was lounging just inside the guardhouse-door sucking away at a *narghile;* but he bounded to his feet at my signal, reached behind him for a package and came straight to the gate.

"Here, Frank, take this," he said. "But do not touch me."

"I am still all right," I answered.

"That is good," he replied, peering at me through the darkness. "Yes, I can tell by your voice that you speak the truth. Here, give me that canteen. I will get you some more water."

I gave it to him, and five minutes later he returned with it.

"I am only prolonging the agony for you, Frank," he grumbled as he slipped it through the bars. "You must fall sooner or later. The scourge will get you."

"But the blessing of Allah will fall upon you and your children and your children's children," I returned. "And besides—I may yet escape."

I could feel rather than see his form stiffen in the gloom.

"You will not escape from me, Frank," he said curtly. "Not alive, at least."

"What?" I said recklessly. "You know I am the victim of a plot of Shaitan himself. Would you not help me to escape?"

"Orders are orders, Frank," he replied stiffly—and he turned and walked away.

The good food the old officer had given me, washed down by pure cold water, made me somewhat cheerier and in due course I fell asleep, profiting by the moderated temperature.

Another day passed, the monotony broken by the distant booming of guns miles away down the coast of Marmora—the Turkish warships trying to prevent the Bulgars from occupying Silivri, I learned afterward.

That night when I went to the gate and called to the old Hamidian, he would not speak to me, although he handed me a loaf of bread and refilled the canteen for me. I slept but fitfully. Why I do not know, but that night the horrors of the stockade became for the first time a fixed obsession to me. I no longer could divert myself by thinking of the outside world. All my attention was concentrated upon the happenings around me. When I slept I dreamed horrible dreams, and I awoke to hear screams rising from every side. Sometimes they were real, sometimes my imagination.

In the morning I again made up my mind that I would not permit myself to weaken. The bright sunlight heartened me, and after a frugal meal of bread and water I set out to exercise. Exercise, I had persuaded myself, was the only thing that could keep me from going to pieces, and I went about it with desperate eagerness.

First I trotted up and down the clear patch of ground in which I had chosen my retreat until I was winded. Then after a brief rest I performed an elaborate series of calisthenics and setting-up movements. Then I rested some more; and finally I tried shadow-boxing. I dare say if anybody had seen me they would have thought me insane. But after three hours of it I was physically weary and mentally normal again.

I had the last of my bread and a drink of water by way of lunch, and then lay down on my back in the grass, shut my ears to the bedlam in the stockade and endeavored to remember "Henry Esmond"—to reconstruct it, chapter by chapter. This is a more difficult feat than you might suppose. But by intense concentration I had brought the hero to manhood before I noticed a commotion by the stockade-gate.

Thinking it would be only another dismal instalment of cholera-patients, I turned my eyes away, but almost instantly the purring of a powerful motor struck my ears. I looked up; a big black limousine was slowly rolling through the gate, an escort of lancers riding close around it.

A yell of joy and hungry anticipation went up from the hundreds of wretches lying in their festering misery along its way. They did not know what it meant, this unheard-of departure from the routine of the camp of the condemned; but at least it was a novelty. It might mean better fortune for some one, and that some one might be any one.

Some even thought it might be the Padishah himself, come to bestow Allah's blessing and a miraculous cure upon all sufferers. It was pathetic, unnerving, to see the way they staggered toward the path of the car, fending against the lance butts of the cavalrymen, falling in front of the wheels, beseeching, appealing.

But the car rolled slowly on without a halt, rolled on directly toward where I was standing. It came to a halt a few feet away, and the lancers opened out, fan-shape, so as to prevent any of the cholera-patients from coming closer.

The rest all happened too quickly to be described in words. It flashed out with the instantaneous registration of action of a cinematograph film. The door of the car snapped open and from it stepped—almost tumbled—Hélène von Anhalt! I was so astonished at sight of her that I scarcely noticed that her companion was Kemil Bey.

The Countess von Anhalt looked at me a long moment—I was a sorry spectacle, in filthy clothes, with tangled hair and a bristle of beard on my face—and then I thought she would throw herself into my arms.

"Are you sick?" she cried. "Are you—— Have you——"

"No," I answered dully. "I'm all right."

She gave a glad cry of joy and came nearer to me.

"You never thought I knew?" she pressed. "You never thought I had anything to do with this hellish thing?"

I was still too dazed to understand what she meant.

"It wasn't I—I swear it wasn't I," she went on earnestly. "You'll believe me, won't you? You've got to believe me, Dan Blair. I may not be what they call a good woman—I've never pretended, God knows! But I'm not that sort. You know I'm not."

I am afraid I was not disposed to be generous. You see, I had gone through a good deal in the past three days. Such as it is, that is my excuse.

"Well, I'm here, Countess," I answered coldly. "That's all I know about it. Naturally, it's quite enough for me to know."

SHE shuddered, and a hurt look crept into her eyes. Somehow she gave me the impression of having lost all her worldliness and cynical *diablerie*, and become all of a sudden a little girl again. And it made me feel bad, too. I was sorry for her, sorry for what I had just said, sorry that even Hélène von Anhalt should be in such a position, with a half circle of Turkish troopers looking on, and Kemil Bey, decent fellow that he was, biting his mustache and trying to stare anywhere except at us or the besieging horde of cholera-patients whose lamentations filled the air.

"You are rather bitter," she said next.

"Well, I suppose you have a right to be. But after all, you ought to know that I fight fair. I—I—you know I couldn't be capable of this."

Perhaps some last flicker of doubt showed in my face, for she whirled on her heel and beckoned Kemil forward.

"You tell him!" she commanded. "Did I know anything about this until that cur Griffenstein began to boast of it this morning?"

"It's true, Blair," Kemil said gravely. "She knew no more about von Griffenstein's little scheme than I did—and if she is responsible, so am I. But he gave the fellow his orders, and neither of us dreamed of such a thing as this until we cross-questioned him this morning when he showed up for the first time since he left to get you. He had been on a spree over in Scutari, and came back only to get some more money from the Countess."

"I'm satisfied," I returned, and I offered her my hand. "There's my hand on it, Countess. I did you an injustice."

She took my hand, but the hurt look stayed in her eyes.

"You think that because I am a spy, and—and—because I steal and cheat and deceive," she said in a choked voice—"you think that—that—I—I am capable of anything."

"I don't any more, Countess," I said. "And I was in the wrong—very much in the wrong—and I beg your pardon."

"No," she replied, shaking her head. "I don't deserve to have you beg my pardon. I really don't. But I'm glad you think enough of me to do it, at any rate."

And she turned and climbed into the limousine. I supposed the interview was over, and looked helplessly at Kemil; but he laughed and dropped a gauntleted hand on my ragged shoulder.

"Where's your baggage, Blair?"

"Do you mean to say you can take a man out of this place who has been here three days?" I stammered.

"You forget that Kemil Pasha is my uncle," he responded lightly. "Come, old chap, get in beside the Countess. We owe you some good treatment for all you've been through, and you are going to get it. You shall taste the greatest luxuries in the power of the Ottoman government to bestow." He grinned broadly at sight of the added bewilderment on my face. "Yes, you shall have a whole palace all to yourself."

Too dazed fully to comprehend what was happening, I let him help me into the tonneau of the car, sank back on the soft cushions beside Hélène von Anhalt, and almost before I knew it was being jounced out of the stockade gate past the guardhouse, where my friend the old Hamidian officer was standing at attention. The wind of the open country blew in my face, the clatter of the hoofs of the lancer escort rattled an accompaniment to the hum of the motor.

Strangely enough, in my utter abandonment I never stopped to think of the effect my transfer might have upon Masoya's efforts to rescue me when she got my message from the stockade. Probably this was because I already began to look upon myself as a free man.

"I suppose you know the American Ambassador will have something to say as soon as he hears of my imprisonment," I remarked to Kemil Bey as we bowled along toward Constantinople.

He smiled largely at me, no more impressed than had been that ruffian von Griffenstein, and winked at Hélène von Anhalt—who did not respond to his signal.

"My dear fellow," he replied pleasantly, "the American Ambassador will not hear of your capture."

"How can he help it?" I demanded peevishly.

"Oh, you don't always have to chop an unbeliever's head off to make him believe in the Koran," responded Kemil. "The Countess and I never planned to put you in a cholera-pen and get rid of you that way, but we had a perfectly practicable plan for cloistering you from the disturbances of the world until your accessibility could no longer be harmful to us."

I glowered at him; but he only laughed again.

"My dear fellow, today to me, tomorrow to thee. Twice it has been your turn to hold the upper hand. Now, do not begrudge it to me—more especially as you must admit that we have just saved you from a very unpleasant ending."

"Where are you taking me?" I demanded, ignoring his persiflage.

"Did you ever hear of the Hilmi Bagtchi Palace?"

I nodded. Every one who has ever been in Constantinople has heard of the Hilmi

Bagtchi Palace, one of the follies of a dead and gone Sultan, a fairyland of riotous Oriental architecture, set in the midst of a verdant park far up the European shores of the Bosporus toward the Black Sea entrance, isolated, seldom visited except when the Sultan or some member of his family makes it a temporary Summer residence.

"Well, Blair, you are to be the tenant of the Hilmi Bagtchi Palace. It's no small honor. I never heard of any other dog of an unbeliever being put up there."

"I must be very popular in Constantinople, Kemil," I said.

"You are," he agreed. "With his Majesty the Sultan, his Highness my uncle, his Excellency Nazim Pasha, the Minister of War, and the necessary officers and agents who participated in your capture. I assure you, Blair, there is not another soul who has the slightest idea that you are in Constantinople."

"It is a good plan and a daring one," I answered suavely. "Quite worthy of you, Countess," I added for her benefit.

She regarded me from under lazy, half-closed lids.

"Do you remember the last conversation we had in Sofia?" she inquired softly.

"Yes," I admitted. "But after all, it's as Kemil says,'today to thee, tomorrow to me.'"

"Ah," she objected, "but tomorrow never comes."

CHAPTER XVII

TWO SWIM THE BOSPORUS

I SHALL pass over the first two months of my experience as a state prisoner. One day was pretty much like its predecessor.

So far as comfort was concerned, Kemil Bey lived up to his promise. Anything I wanted was mine for the asking. Kemil himself, who was especially entrusted with the guardianship of my person, came frequently to fence with me or gossip about the concerns of the world outside.

The one restriction imposed upon me was that I might not send any message outside my prison. The guards, who numbered a small regiment, were all picked men, and had strict orders not to communicate with me except by necessary monosyllables.

It sounds melodramatic, but Kemil had the right idea. I was supposed to have died, and he and his ingenious friends did everything possible to prove that I had. When Savoff made his demand for my release the Turks replied with a flat assertion that they knew nothing about me.

Pressed still further, they produced the officer who had commanded the detachment that captured me, and he swore to having seen me buried by his troopers in a village where I had died of wounds. Of course the American Ambassador ransacked the cholera-stockade to begin with, and Kemil clinched his proofs by escorting a delegation of diplomats through all the prisons. Even the hospitals were searched, Kemil told me with a chuckle.

One thing that puzzled me at first was that in the face of what she knew to be Turkish lies, Masoya failed to produce the message Stoyan had carried from the cholera-stockade. Afterward I was to learn of the girl's shrewd strategy which had instantly detected the foolishness of acquainting the enemy that she had positive evidence of my presence within their lines. It gave her a foundation to work on when she became convinced that diplomatic processes would not be successful.

Strangely enough, too, the Turks never suspected that the Bulgarian protests were started by a message from me.

In the meantime matters went from bad to worse for my friends. Adrianople was proving an extraordinarily hard nut to crack; and the cholera, which had devastated the Turkish troops, was communicated to the Bulgars. But notwithstanding this the army came up to Tchataldja, eager to fight, straining at the leash.

Instead, its spirit was frittered away in a succession of irresolute feints and bombardments.

Of course Savoff bluffed, but the Turks raised him every time. They knew they held his trump card. They were willing to make peace, yes; but on terms wholly impossible to accept. Although Macedonia was lost, and Adrianople was the only place in Thrace that flew the Crescent, in Albania Janina and Scutari still held out; and this provided excuse for Turkey not to yield. The opposing armies were dead-locked. Day after day Kemil Bey would come in and laugh and say that it would soon be over—the Bulgars would get tired of waiting in the mud and cold out there beyond Tchataldja and pack up and go home.

"Ah, but wait until Scutari and Janina

and Adrianople have been taken," I would retort. "Then you will see 500,000 Slavs and Greeks swarming over your Tchataldja Lines, and you will be wiped out."

But in my heart I knew that this was a long way off. Already the Greeks and Servians were beginning to tire of the war, for most of their objectives had been accomplished. At the first excuse they would be eager to sign a truce.

After our friendly arguments Kemil and I would play a game of chess or have a turn at the foils in the big marble hall of the women's wing, where my quarters were located. This was the most retired part of the Palace, next to and overhanging the water; and three or four lines of sentries surrounded me on every side except toward the Straits where the high walls were judged sufficient protection against my escape. As a matter of fact a fly could not have escaped from Hilmi Bagtchi without help. Kemil was a product of the German school, and thoroughness was his hobby.

The guards he placed around me were all members of savage tribes and races from the uttermost confines of Asia Minor and Arabia. Few of them could understand me when I spoke to them, and all had orders not to speak to me. But my jailer was a very likable chap, and considerate into the bargain. He came in almost every afternoon to chat and give me a little exercise.

Some six weeks after my incarceration, when the deadlock had become pronounced, he informed me that Hélène von Anhalt had gone to Vienna, which meant that some new deviltry was being cooked up. It made me fairly writhe, but I did not dare to let even Kemil see my true feelings.

A PERIOD of extreme mental depression ensued that lasted for more than two weeks. The manner of its lifting was most peculiar. I was sitting down to my dinner one evening, just after bidding Kemil good-by, utterly forlorn and downhearted, when the sergeant who always supervised the service was called from the room. The trooper who assisted him, a dark-browed, Gipsy-looking fellow, whom I did not remember to have seen before, stooped quickly toward me as if to offer a dish he carried, and muttered:

"Your friends are working for you."

That was all. He did not speak another word; and half a minute later, when the sergeant returned, he was going about his business as impassively as ever. But that evening I ate very little for dinner. My brain was in a turmoil. For I realized that more than half the battle was won if my friends had been able to follow my closed trail to the place in which I was hidden.

But many days passed before I received another sign of encouragement. Sometimes I spied the Gipsy-looking trooper in the distance, but he was not detailed to any duty that brought him near me, and evidently he did not dare to do anything that might arouse suspicion. Indeed, despite my impatience, I appreciated the need for excessive caution. So I had to wait until the end of January for the next word of cheer.

I made the opportunity for this myself. Being out on the terrace in the afternoon, I discovered at one and the same time that my messenger was on duty as bodyguard and that my overcoat was necessary. When I told him to fetch my coat he nodded, and whistled for another sentry near by to relieve him. Presently he returned with the overcoat, and held it for me to slip on.

"We are having trouble with a plan," he breathed in my ear as I slowly slipped on the coat. "M. is coming."

After that I did not know whether to be glad or sorry. I had the utmost confidence in Masoya where others might fail; but I dreaded the idea of her being thrust into the danger that I knew awaited her in Constantinople. This dread was intensified when Kemil Bey came with news of the assassination of Nazim Pasha, the commander in chief and Minister of War, by members of the Young Turk party who had accused him of favoring peace at any terms. In consequence of this Constantinople had been placed under even stricter martial law than had prevailed before.

But fortunately for my peace of mind Masoya's agent seemed to have gained the good graces of his superiors, for two days later I found him detailed as bodyguard again. At the earliest opportunity I led him into a Summer-house on the sea-wall that was out of sight of the Palace windows.

"What do you hear from M.?" I demanded. "Is she coming?"

"No. She has decided to wait until things quiet down in the city," he replied.

"Are the plans making progress?"

He shook his head.

"It's slow work, *guspodine,*" he said

bluntly. "This is not a robin's nest."

I groaned aloud. It seemed as if Fate were fighting on the side of my enemies.

"Do you want to say anything else?" he asked hurriedly.

"Yes," I snapped. "Who are you?"

"You would not know me if I told you, *guspodine*," he answered with a smile, "although you have seen me before. I am one of Beran Kokalji's band."

"Of the Tziganes?"

"Yes. Most of the band are in the city. The Lady sent us in to be of use in case of an emergency. We——"

He broke off at sound of a crunching on the gravel without.

"No, *effendi*," he went on, speaking in Turkish and quite loud. "As you know, we are not allowed to speak with you. I can tell you no more."

The sergeant of the guard peered in the doorway of the Summer-house as the Gipsy concluded—

"The *effendi* knows he must not talk to the guards unless it is necessary."

After that I did not see my Tzigane trooper for several weeks. His first chance came on a night when he was detailed again to wait on the table. As he was passing around my chair to take away a plate he contrived to drop a tiny pellet of paper down the back of my neck. Later, when I was alone, I smoothed it out. A narrow strip, less than six inches long, it was covered with fine script that I recognized as Masoya's. It read:

> We have a plan. It may take time. But be ready.
> M.

That was the middle of February. To me the days passed like weeks; the weeks were tenuous as months. I was always ready, yet nothing ever happened. It was the first week in March before I received another message. This time my Tzigane friend displayed less caution.

"We have been spending money, *guspodine*," he said at dinner. "He—" nodding to the sergeant, whose back was discreetly turned—"has been fixed, and so have some of the others. But the plan is not quite ready yet."

AGAIN more than a week dragged by, but my next hint of the plans preparing by my friends was little short of staggering. Striding up and down on the terrace with Kemil Bey, fighting against a vicious gale that blew in tangy with salt moisture from the Black Sea, I chanced to look up in the midst of our conversation and saw a slim, well-set-up stripling tramping down the path in the rear rank of a squad of reliefs for the guard. "His" back was toward me, but a single glance told me that the trooper was Masoya Vavaroff.

"Look here," said Kemil testily, "you're not paying the slightest attention to me. What's the matter?"

I caught myself up sharp, and looked studiously in the direction opposite to that which the relief of the guard had taken.

"It's the salt air," I grumbled in answer. "You wouldn't be cheerful, either, if you were cooped up in restricted quarters for months at a time."

"And you call this restricted!" He laughed as he waved his hand toward the broad park that stretched around us. "Was ever prisoner better treated?"

"That isn't the point, Kemil. As a prisoner, I am well treated. But still I am a prisoner, and a man who is a prisoner can not feel comfortable or at home."

"There's no satisfying you," he said with pretended displeasure. "I suppose you want to have this war stopped so that you can get out."

"Not for a minute," I answered quickly. "I want it to go on until you are licked out of your boots—as you will be pretty soon."

I saw no more of Masoya; nor did I see the trooper who had acted as messenger, until the following Wednesday when he brushed by me on the terrace.

"It will be Friday night," he muttered.

During the next two nights and days I jumped at every deviation in the calm routine of my prison-ordered life. It seemed to me that Kemil Bey stayed an unconscionable long time each day, and that on Friday afternoon he was unduly solicitous about my comfort and well-being.

"You know, Hélène von Anhalt is back," he said just as he was leaving. "She came in on the Constanza steamer yesterday. She wanted to come out with me this afternoon, but she didn't seem to be sure that you would care about seeing her."

I shivered at the thought of Hélène von Anhalt's keen eyes probing my face at such a time. And suppose she should happen to get a view of that slim-waisted stripling of the guard! Decidedly, the Fates had been on my side this afternoon. What Kemil Bey, honest lad that he was, missed entirely, would be an open book to her cynically keen observation.

"I'm just as glad you didn't bring her out, Kemil," I answered him, as carelessly as I could. "She—well, she's not the sort of woman it pays to have over-much to do with."

"That's right," he agreed. "I didn't encourage her, to tell you the truth. Well, I'll see you tomorrow; and we'll try out that thrust under the parry again."

For the first time in months I smiled cheerily at Kemil Bey's retreating back. It was refreshing to feel that this time the joke was going to be on him.

DINNER was soon over—I had nobody to talk to, nothing to do but eat and wish that the minutes sped faster. Then I went to my room followed by a guard, with loaded rifle and bayonet fixed, who halted at the door. Inside I was assured of privacy and I walked restlessly up and down the floor, waiting for the hour of my escape to strike, and wondering what hour it would be and what form it would take. As I strode up and down, hour after hour, until midnight was almost due, I moiled over a thousand and one daring methods of executing the plot. I was prepared for violence—outcries in the night.

Judge then of my surprise when the sound that finally broke the stillness was the opening of the door. I turned quick as a flash to face Masoya standing there in her soldier's uniform and fez, a heavy bundle of rope in her hand. She smiled faintly.

"There isn't time to say anything now!" she warned. "Come—we must start at once."

She moved toward the window.

"It's cold water down there," she said. "Can you swim?"

"Yes," I said, wondering.

She had already begun to unroll the bundle, which I saw to be a rope-ladder; and as I answered her she made one end fast to the door-knob, bracing it around several of the heavier pieces of European furniture in the room.

"We must swim the Straits," she explained quickly. "There is no other way. It is only a thousand yards across from here. We shall have to chance it, that is all. There was no other plan that was practicable."

But not even the thought of the dark, chilly water below the window could dismay me with liberty in prospect. I had slipped off my coat and shoes before she finished speaking.

"We must hurry," she went on. "The men on guard are bribed, but to save themselves they will have to get away before they are relieved."

I nodded. Words were obviously superfluous at such a time. She stripped off her own coat and heavy soldier's boots, and I hoisted her through the window.

"Do not wait for me to get all the way down," she whispered, as I leaned over her. "The ladder will hold two."

But before I swung out to follow her I took a look up and down the Straits. Far off to the west there was a faint blur of lights on the horizon that was Constantinople. Nearer, and this side of the bends in the channel, were the riding lights of several cruisers. But there were no lights within a distance of two miles to the westward, while to the eastward the guard-boats at the Black Sea entrance flashed their searchlights at least a mile outside of the strip we were to cross.

It was forty feet down the sheer walls of Hilmi Bagtchi, and without a light to go by it was no easy feat. Even with Masoya ballasting the ladder at its bottom the light fabric swayed continuously, and the next rung was generally a foot away from where you had supposed it. But at last I reached a point within six feet of the water and looked down at Masoya, crouched just above the ripples breaking against the base of the Palace walls.

"Ready?" she questioned.

"Yes."

She slipped in, with a gasp at the shock of the ice-cold water, and a second later I was beside her.

"No time to lose," I chattered between clabbering teeth. "We must make it while we have life warm in us."

Silently, yet with desperate eagerness, we struck out through the black water of the Straits. At first every muscle in my body was numbed by the paralyzing cold, and I could hear the plucky girl beside me gasping at the recurring shock of the wavelets that slapped her face.

But if death was around us, just as surely death lurked behind. The only road to safety was the road ahead. And there is nothing men or women can not do in the face of such circumstances. Spurred on by the icy cold, we swam at a racing clip, aided by the fact that it was just between tides, with what little set there was drifting us down toward a point which projected out into the water and made our course all the shorter.

And after the first ten minutes our efforts began to tell on our circulations; the blood commenced to course faster and faster under the spur of abnormal conditions, and the distress of the cold was diminished.

I was really surprised when we discerned the overhanging trees of the opposite shore.

"Almost there," panted Masoya. Her face, wet and white, slid up beside my shoulder. Her lips were drawn tight, but there was a smile in her eyes.

"You are the bravest girl in the world—and the sweetest," I found myself saying without any premeditation.

She rested one hand on my shoulder by way of answer, and at the same instant I kicked down and struck the shelving beach. It was a strange enough setting for lover's talk—and it became stranger.

"I am what you——" she started to say; then exclaimed, "Hark!"

I listened, and from somewhere in the darkness overhead came the whirring and drumming of a powerful engine.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SINEWS OF WAR

"QUICK!" she exclaimed. "We have no time to lose."

Breathless from our swim, we plunged through the shallows and scrambled up the bank. But before we were half way to the protecting belt of trees a knot of men swarmed out to meet us. I was holding Masoya by the hand, and without any hesitation I swung her behind me and squared off to meet the rush I expected. To my surprise, however, the newcomers seemed to be disgruntled at my challenge and stopped irresolutely in their tracks.

It was Masoya who grappled with the situation.

"It's all right; he doesn't know," she cried, slipping around in front of me. And to me she added: "It is Kokalji and his men. They have warm clothing for us. We must hurry. The 'plane is almost here."

"The what?" I stammered in surprise. She fairly pushed me toward the trees.

"The hydroplane. How did you think we were going to get away—by motor? Now hurry. The forts and ships will have heard the engine and we shall barely have time to climb aboard."

The roar of the hydroplane's engine was deafening as I stumbled after one of the Gipsies, who led me by the hand, into a corner of the thicket above the beach. Here he handed me a bottle of raw cognac, and then set to work to unpack a bundle of clothing. Presently I had stripped off my wet clothes, and was arrayed anew in thick, heavy woolens, with an ear-tabbed cap pulled down over my face and mittens on my hands. The cognac was coursing through my veins and I felt for the first time like a free man who is ready to sell his freedom at only one price.

When I regained the beach I saw that Kokalji was standing just above the water's edge with a lighted lantern in his hand. Overhead the pounding of hard-driven cylinders sounded nearer, although less vigorous, and the acrid odor of "cooked" oil struck my nostrils.

Gradually I made out a flat, bird-shaped thing that was soaring down in concentric circles, dropping toward the surface of the Straits a couple of hundred yards off shore. While I watched it seemed to slide out of the air and come to rest on the water. Then the propellers began to revolve again, and it glided, ghostlike and effortless, toward where Kokalji stood with his gleaming lantern.

Masoya's hand pressed my arm. I turned to find her dressed as I was, in long, heavy trousers, coat and cap.

"We had to send to Paris for him," she murmured, indicating the shadowy bulk of the aeroplane. "That was why it took so long. I would not trust to any of our army aviators or to an ordinary machine."

She told me the man's name, but I will not mention it here. It is one of those best-known in the world of aviation, and when next I stop in Paris I intend to hunt him up and tell him over again how much I owe him for that midnight ride.

Of what followed I have only the haziest recollection. I remember a voice, speaking French, that croaked from amid the meshed wires and struts of the floating hydroplane, and that Masoya swiftly translated to

Kokalji, who drove his men headlong into the water and had them slowly swing the 'plane around so that its nose pointed out into the Straits. Then first Masoya and next myself were lifted up in the arms of two men and deposited gently in a long, boat-like compartment between the two wings of the machine, and directly behind the hunched form of the pilot.

In the meantime guns had begun to mutter in the batteries that edged the Straits toward the Black Sea entrance, and several of the guard ships had weighed anchor and were steaming toward us, flashing their searchlights in every direction.

In Hilmi Bagtchi all was silent, showing that our escape was still unknown. But it was obvious that if we hoped to get away there was no time to lose. As it was, the starting of the powerful motor would be the signal for a hail of shot hurled skyward from every corner of the earth beneath. For by this time the Turks must be satisfied that the strange night-craft of the air was not a friend.

Our pilot raised his hand. Kokalji and his men stepped back to shore; there was a sudden explosion of gas, and the next minute we were mounting into the air. All sounds were drowned by the turmoil of the engine and the constant threshing of the propeller, but below us I could see a rippling succession of flashes that I recognized for guns fired up at us. Simultaneously the searchlights swung upward and wavered backward and forward across the sky like huge pointers of radiance, trying to place us in the friendly darkness.

But we were beyond chance of harm by them in a very few minutes. Hurtling through space at fifty miles an hour, lulled by a gentle rocking motion and shut off from the world by the racket of the engine, one felt remarkably safe and secure. A single rifle bullet, well-placed, would have sent us plunging headlong to destruction. But I never had any fear of such an untoward ending, and events justified my optimism.

I soon noted that we were hugging the Black Sea coast. The splotches of light that were Constantinople were left far behind us to the left. We passed a few isolated villages that dotted the gloomy mass of the Forest of Belgrade, and a couple of cruisers and torpedo boats that patrolled the scant stretch of seaboard left to Turkey, extending as far as Cape Kara. For the next few miles we were over water, but it seemed only a little while since we had started when we swung inland again, traveling at great height diagonally above Derkos, the right wing of the Turkish fortifications on the Tchataldja Lines.

BENEATH us the country was gridironed from sea to sea by the camp-fires of the Turkish army. They made a broad band of light across the peninsula, and beyond them lay a belt of unbroken darkness, accentuated by the glare that rose from the Bulgarian camp-fires just over the horizon.

Crouched in the trembling body of the aeroplane, Masoya and I could map out the entire chain of Turkish fortifications from where Fort Amintchagir flashed its searchlights across Lake Derkos and the marshes that covered the Turkish right flank to Kuru Kavak Redoubt and the strong web of trenches that veiled the center between Tashlar Bajir and the twin Hamidieh Forts, and so on to where Baghchi Tasja and Giaur Bajir defended the railway-line and the head of Buyuk Chekmeje Bay.

For some miles we hovered over the Bulgarian Position, looking for the railroad-line. Our pilot finally picked up the tracks by means of the station lamps at Kabakje, where, as we swooped low, we saw long strings of baggage trucks being unloaded by lantern light.

There was a hint of the dawn in the eastern sky by now, and it was not so difficult to follow the dwindling perspective of the rails that traversed a countryside whence every peaceful, law-abiding man had fled.

A ghastly gray light had begun to spread over the land when we soared over Muradli Station and dropped to earth in a meadow that was fringed with the tents of the headquarters staff. Early as it was, a crowd of officers and soldiers poured into the open space, and we alighted in the midst of a small ovation. The first man to reach the side of the aeroplane was Boris Kurtsky, thinned and weather-beaten by six months of Winter campaigning, and he helped me to lift Masoya out of the cramped space between the dragon-wings.

Boris pumped my hand up and down until I had to wrench it away from him, and the bystanders gave several cheers that were hearty despite the fact that the rank and file did not know what it all meant.

"You are the most troublesome man who ever came to Bulgaria," Boris was protesting between his exclamations of delight. "It seems to me you are always being helped out of difficulties that you get yourself into."

Masoya simply smiled and squeezed my other hand. What could I say to her? What could any man say to a woman like this, who was not afraid to play with men at their own game, and not ask for odds?

As a matter of fact, before we had opportunity for speech, an automobile rolled through the crowd, and the staff officer who alighted from it announced that General Savoff had sent him to fetch us at once to his quarters in the village.

"Did you do—what you did—for me or for the cause?" I asked abruptly when we were alone in the tonneau.

"That is not a fair question," she answered with averted eyes.

"Yes, it is," I insisted. "Did you?"

"I did it for you," she said slowly, and looked me squarely in the face. "But I would have done it for the cause—if it had not been for you," she added hastily. "I would have done it anyway, for the cause."

"And the cause prospers?"

She hesitated.

"Yes—now that we have you again. Yet——" She shook her head. "I can not discuss this offhand with you. Wait until affairs here at Tchataldja are settled. Then you can go to Sofia and talk it over with Boris's uncle."

"I'd lots rather talk it over with you," I answered less fatuously than it sounds.

A smile flickered across her tired face.

"I dare say you would," she retorted. "But here are General Savoff's quarters. You may make my excuses to the General. I need a rest. Good-by—Dan."

The tone in which she said that last word —a very plain, homely word—left me transfixed to the muddy, frost-riven cobblestones of Muradli's main street, while the aide-de-camp who had climbed down from the driver's seat of the car spoke to me twice. Finally he touched me on the arm.

"The General is waiting for you, *guspodine*," he said politely.

"Eh?" I exclaimed. "Ah, yes. Of course." Then my temper got the better of me. "Well, why didn't you say it before? Oh! No, I didn't hear—— All right."

He answered with a cheerful smile and bowed me most courteously into the General's waiting-room, where an orderly handed me a cup of coffee that was the most welcome thing I had tasted in months.

Savoff listened to my story in silence until I was half way through. Then he rang the bell on his desk, and when the orderly entered said—

"Tell my adjutant to telephone General Dimitrieff to have General Gortcheff put under arrest at once."

He did not interrupt me again, and after I had finished he sat for some minutes with his head in his hand, pondering deeply. Then he went to a great map of the Balkan terrain that hung on one of the walls of the room and studied minutely the clumps of tiny, vari-colored flags that were stuck here and there, and especially those before Constantinople and Adrianople. When he swung around abruptly I knew that he had made up his mind.

"I could force terms tomorrow, now that you are safe again, Mr. Blair," he said. "But to make the terms more crushingly insistent—and to lift our prestige above any possibility of dispute—I judge it essential that we should first capture Adrianople by storm. Our plans had not contemplated this for two weeks yet, but by sacrificing a few thousand men we can do it successfully within the week. Therefore I am afraid I must ask you to stay with us a few days longer."

He said it as coolly as I would have discussed a matter of a few thousands more or less in interest.

All that day headquarters fairly seethed. Generals came and went by train and automobile and on horseback. The telegraph and telephone offices were buried under official messages. The clerks and orderlies did not have an idle moment. It seemed as if I was the only man in that vicinity without an allotted task—although I had been given strict injunctions to sleep.

Sleep was impossible in the midst of such bustle, however, and I remained a looker-on until the fruition of Savoff's activities, which came about five o'clock in the afternoon in the shape of a husky, thunderous murmur, pulsing over the rolling hills and plains of Thrace like echoes of the monotonous hammer-blows of some gigantic Titan.

It was the opening of the cannonade that was to prepare the way for the last assault upon Adrianople.

MEN said it was the most awful cannonade in the history of war. I do not know. But I do know that it could be heard for a radius of one hundred miles. For four days and nights it lasted, never pausing, appalling in its tireless ferocity and the note of inevitable doom that throbbed through every minute of it—a fiendishly wonderful, beautiful and repellent symphony of war. On the fifth night it ended. Adrianople was taken.

Bulgarian engineers clad in steel cuirasses cut the wire entanglements; herds of cattle were driven in advance of the assaulting columns to explode the mines sunk under the glacis of the fortifications; the Turkish trenches and redoubts were carried in a welter of blood and human agony; the fire of machine-guns was stopped by the sheer weight of bodies thrown up against their muzzles; resistance was cut away at the point of the bayonet; and as fast as one fort was taken, its guns were turned upon the next that still held out.

Men died in thousands, but the strongest fortress in southeastern Europe, a fortress that German engineers had called impregnable, had been taken with the cold steel, and the Bulgarians had proved to all Europe that they were capable of doing that which modern warfare had said could not be done.

Savoff was satisfied. The next morning he sent a curt message into Constantinople that he was ready to meet plenipotentiaries. In the afternoon of the following day occurred the historic interview between our delegates and the representatives of the Sultan, in a railroad-car drawn up on a siding within our lines a short distance to the north of the village of Tchataldja.

It was short and to the point.

"This discussion is merely a matter of form, gentlemen," said Savoff to the Turkish delegates, in opening the proceedings. "As you doubtless have heard, and as we are prepared to prove to you, our troops day before yesterday carried Adrianople by storm. There are no organized bodies of Turkish troops remaining in Thrace or Macedonia, and such few bodies as exist, together with the places that they hold, in Albania are being surrounded and reduced by the troops of our Allies. We would suggest that you treat for peace on a basis of the territorial status quo."

"But we have more than three hundred thousand men, armed and equipped, inside the Tchataldja Lines," objected the senior Turkish plenipotentiary. "What is to prevent us from taking the offensive against you? We have unlimited supplies of men to draw upon in Asia Minor and Anatolia. I may also say that we are assured of funds in reason."

"You would make nothing by such a course," returned Savoff sententiously. "You would wear yourselves out. We are prepared to keep the field until all resistance is crushed."

Then the Turkish plenipotentiaries played their trump card—although they must have known it was a forlorn hope.

"Nobody questions the bravery of the Bulgarian army, General," remarked the senior Turkish representative suavely. "That has been proved—to our cost; alas that I should have to say it. But in modern war, as you know, General, it is not only men and guns that count. There is a force greater than man or the engines of destruction he devises, a force that constitutes the true sinews of war.

"To make war you must have food for many idle men, you must have unlimited quantities of ammunition, new weapons to replace those which have deteriorated. Money is the sinews of war, General—and I know the accumulations of your treasury to within half a million francs."

Savoff did not even bother to answer him. In his curt, offhand way the Bulgarian commander in chief rang for an orderly and bade the man fetch me from where I sat by a fire with the members of his staff.

"This, gentlemen," he said when I entered the car, "is Mr. Daniel Blair, the American banker of New York. Although perhaps you did not take advantage of it," he added with a touch of sarcasm, "you recently had an opportunity to make Mr. Blair's acquaintance. He has arranged with an American banking syndicate to advance us a loan of one hundred and twenty-five million francs. That is correct, I think, Mr. Blair?"

"Quite correct, General."

A pallor, the first indication of dismay, began to spread over the faces of the Turkish delegates. Their hands twitched nervously as they put their heads together and whispered hurriedly.

"In view of the evidence you have before you, gentlemen," pursued Savoff calmly, "I need scarcely point out that my royal master, the Czar of Bulgaria, is sufficiently assured of what you accurately term the sinews of war to make evident to you the folly of continued resistance against his forces."

The senior of the three Ottoman plenipotentiaries nodded his head dumbly.

"What you say is true, General," he said after an interval. His voice was singularly flat and toneless. "Your terms?"

"Surrendering of all claim to Thrace, north of the line now held by his Majesty's arms, including Adrianople; all of Macedonia, Epirus and Novi-Bazar; and all of the lands and islands now held by the troops of the Balkan Alliance."

Savoff's voice rang like steel clanging on steel. The Turk shrugged his shoulders.

"If I still believed in Allah," he said, "I would say it was his will. Many years ago my people took away these lands from your people. Now you take them back again. You have the sinews of war. What you say must be."

Savoff bowed, and drew forward pens and paper.

"Then, with your permission, we will now prepare the protocol," he said.

CHAPTER XIX

AUSTRIA SHOWS HER HAND

WE SAT in the minister's study—the minister, Masoya and I; and outside the crowds rolled up and down the streets, shouting themselves hoarse. The armistice and the certain peace which must follow had just been proclaimed, and all Sofia had gone mad.

"Hurrah for the Alliance!" they cried. "Long live the Confederation of the Balkans!" "Long live the Emperor Ferdinand!"

From a score of hastily improvised rostrums ardent speakers harangued the masses and painted glowing pictures of the coming Imperial Confederation of which Bulgaria should be leader.

"Hurrah for Ferdinand the Victorious!" answered the crowds.

Mobs paraded back and forth before the Palace, singing the "Sheumy Maritza" and celebrating the virtues of their ruler.

To me, who had come a few short hours before from the war zone, the savage turmoil was stunning. I was all but swept away by it.

But the minister and Masoya took things more calmly. They were chiefly interested in dissection of the phenomena that were being worked out before them, and endeavoring to trace the underlying causes of the surface manifestations.

"Yet this is only what you yourself have expected, what you predicted," I remonstrated with Masoya. "Why be skeptical? It is genuine. How could it be anything else?"

"You permit your youthful illusions to run away with you, Dan," chided the minister. "A well-organized demonstration is never spontaneous. Any politician will tell you that."

"But granting that there is political manipulation in the affair——"

"Why, yes, I will grant it," conceded the minister. "As a matter of fact, I gave my men their instructions myself, this morning."

"You old rogue!" I expostulated. "Can't you be——"

"It's true," cut in Masoya hastily. "We did it because we felt it was necessary to stir up as much dynastic feeling as possible, Dan. The end justified the means. But it is not the question of spontaneity or lack of spontaneity that is bothering me. It is the question of the meaning of the Austrian influence we have been feeling for the last few days."

"Austrian influence?" I repeated.

"Yes, Austrian influence," she reaffirmed. "Is it not so?"

The minister nodded.

"We began to sense it some days ago, just after I came back from Muradli. Since then it has grown more marked. It reached its culmination yesterday in the release from arrest of Gortcheff.

"Ah, you jump now, Dan! That means something to you. Yes, Gortcheff was released yesterday on the Czar's own order. The only explanation given out was that the charges entered against him were not susceptible of proof and that at such a time the services of so valuable an officer were not to be dispensed with."

"Any other signs?" I pressed.

"Plenty," she answered promptly. "If we knew what the Austrians were playing for, we would not worry. But we do not know, and we can not determine how to meet them."

"But why should Ferdinand play Austria's game when everything is working out to his advantage in despite of Austria?"

"If we knew that, we would have a certain key to our royal master," returned the minister sarcastically. "Seriously though, Dan, it may be that Ferdinand has some plan of his own by which he thinks he can win more than through ours. That is the most likely probability."

"He would never miss the chance to become Emperor of the Balkans," I protested.

"No, but he may think to reach that end by other means than we have arranged for."

"But can not you find out what he is up to, Masoya?" I said to her.

She shook her head.

"He has become crafty with me. Only this morning I protested against Gortcheff's release; I was afraid of the danger it might mean for you—" she raised her eyes level to mine as she spoke, and I tingled under the message they sent—"but he evaded all conversation on the subject, and he would not enter into general political discussions. He said that conditions were manifestly uncertain at present, and that he thought it best not to discuss questions of an international character which had yet to receive the approval of the Great Powers."

"Worrying about his crown again," I grunted disgustedly. "At any rate, we have the splendid fruits of Savoff's victories."

The minister looked at me with a sudden uncanny light flickering in his eyes.

"I wonder," he said softly. "I wonder."

"Why, man alive! You couldn't be surer of anything than you are of those," I cried almost angrily. "They were won cleanly by the sword, and they are held by the sword—and the more I see of this world, the more I believe that that is the best kind of title-deed."

"Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad," he quoted. "I wonder if Ferdinand by any chance could become intoxicated by power——"

Masoya scraped her chair back.

"Faugh!" she cried. "You are too gloomy for me, you two. I am going out for a ride, if there is still a horse in my stables."

The door burst open and Boris Kurtsky blustered in, the great hound Stoyan frisking at his heels.

"Uncle! Masoya! Dan!" he exclaimed. "Whom do you suppose I just saw getting off the Bucharest Express?"

He paused an instant to let his surprise sink home.

"Hélène von Anhalt, in a new frock that must have set the Austrian Secret Service back an even thousand francs."

Nobody said anything, and Boris looked disappointed.

"It's a fact, I tell you," he insisted. "I was getting off the special I came up on from Adrianople, just as the Bucharest train came in. It was so long since we had seen civilized people that some of us waited; and who should get off first but the Anhalt."

"Shall you arrest her?" I asked the minister.

He placed his finger tips carefully together and studied the flames in the grate.

"What do you think, Masoya?" he asked suddenly.

"It would be useless," she said decisively. "The woman would never have dared to return without assurance of safety. She knows the trail she left behind her."

"This begins to look pretty bad," I commented.

"At least it promises the clearing up of the mystery," qualified the minister. "Now I have a suspicion that she may—— Will you excuse me if I call up the Palace?"

THE RETIRED to the cubby-hole opening off the study, where his private telephone was located, and after a few chaffering remarks Boris betook himself off.

"Shall you be going home to America, now?" she asked suddenly.

"Going home?" I answered in surprise. "Why?"

"There is nothing more for you to do, is there?"

"I don't know," I answered slowly. "Perhaps there will be a great deal for me to do. But at least I can promise you that I shall stay until your plans have worked out in one way or another. And whatever I can do to further them——"

"But that is not fair!" she exclaimed.

"After all you have done for me? Why, nobody but you could have planned and executed that escape."

Before she could answer me the minister returned to the room, rubbing his hands with obvious satisfaction.

"As I thought," he remarked. "Quite as I suspected. She has an appointment with his Majesty at ten in the morning."

"I will see his Majesty this evening, then," said Masoya, as she rose to go. Her face was darkened by a burst of the tempestuous passion that I had seen disfigure it once before. "I shall see to it that he knows fully how he is disgracing us by receiving this creature."

She swept from the room like a tragedy-queen, the enormous dog padding silently at her heels. I had looked to see old Kurtsky say something to temper her wrath, but he made no move to check her. Indeed, after a brief space he remarked absent-mindedly:

"Never presume to give that girl advice, Dan. She plays the game by instinct, with a far more certain touch than all my years of experience have given me."

I said good night and left him preparing cipher dispatches to the delegates at the peace conference in London. It was not yet the dinner-hour, and I felt both restless and eager to see for myself this strange enthusiasm which stirred the phlegmatic Bulgars. So I chose a heavy stick from the stand in the hall, pulled my hat down over my head and set out for a walk.

Sofia lies in the midst of a high plateau, ringed around by mountain peaks, and the early Spring day was already beginning to draw to a close. A quarter of an hour after I had started, twilight had fallen.

Contrary to the usual custom of the city, the crowds did not seem to dissipate with the approach of evening. They clustered in front of cafés and about street-corners, and every now and then an irregular column, carrying banners and transparencies, would pass, singing lustily and cheering for the heroes of the hour. It was noteworthy that whenever a band of demonstrators passed the Austrian Ministry, they hissed and groaned in a manner which left no doubt of the feeling the populace entertained for their ruler's friends.

Strolling through the turmoil, I found it no easy task to pick out the agents of the confidential minister. Sometimes I struck meetings which were builded into popularity by a few moments of judicious haranguing and what looked to be the auxiliary efforts of a regular claque. But for the most part the demonstrations were genuine.

In my interest I lost all account of time and direction. Presently I found myself leaving the newer part of the city and walking through the Public Gardens. But even here there was something to interest me. A number of men and women had gathered about the place where Stambuloff, the creator of the new Bulgaria, was shot, to conduct some simple exercises in his memory. After a while I passed on, absorbed in my thoughts, and I was quite surprised suddenly to discover that I was in the heart of the old Turkish quarter—a dingy region of narrow, twisting alleys, blind lanes and noisome courtyards, fronted by medieval, humpbacked, windowless structures, each one outwardly a prison-house or worse. It was in the same breath that I realized I was being followed. In fact, it was probably the automatic perception of those stealthy footsteps far behind me that roused me from my absorption.

At first I was uncertain of the best course to pursue. I was ignorant of this part of town. A glance around me in the unlighted gloom failed to identify my surroundings. I saw no one afoot in the street ahead of me. Behind me there were only those ghostly footfalls, like echoes of my own. To test my suspicions I quickened my pace. The footsteps behind me quickened simultaneously. Emerging into a somewhat wider section of the alley I glanced back over my shoulder, and caught a glimpse of several vaguely defined figures dodging along under the house-walls.

There was but one recourse for me—flight. The puzzle was to pick the shortest way back to the lighted streets of the new town. But a moment's study convinced me that it was hopeless to try and map out a route. I was completely lost. Moreover, the footsteps were coming nearer. I must run for it while I still had a fair head start.

Just at this instant I came to a crack in the wall of buildings to my right. I had not the slightest idea where it led, but I darted into it and began to run as fast as I could. Before I had turned the first corner I could hear the footsteps behind me coming on pell-mell—and I knew from the sound that there were more than two men after me.

The lane I had picked out twisted capriciously here and there, wound back on itself, then doubled again—always without meeting any intersecting lanes—and suddenly debouched on to a little square with an old fountain in the center and a massive building on the opposite side, which I recognized as the Little Mosque. In the rear of the

Mosque, I knew, there must be a street which would take me back toward the new town. I sprinted across the square at top speed, straining through the darkness to see where this street broke through the shouldering walls of the Mosque and the near-by buildings.

But in my hurry I forgot to allow for the curb which surrounded the fountain; my foot was caught and I pitched headlong into the gutter. By blind luck I clung to my stick, and I was on my feet again in a second but little the worse for the spill. It was too late to run on, though. The first of my assailants was already on me—a lean, brawny fellow of the town riffraff, a hybrid of every race in the Balkans, with a long, curve-bladed knife flashing in his hand. As he came up he made a dart for me, bending low to rush my guard; but I cut him across the wrist and knocked his knife across the open space.

This gave me opportunity to get my back to the fountain, and a lightning summary of the situation. On the heels of the first ruffian had pelted three others; and they came up more warily, circling around for an opening or to tempt me away from my position. The first man nursed his wrist and cursed; then, when he saw his mates closing in, ran over and picked up his knife. But he had to hold it in his left hand.

In my hip pocket was an automatic pistol; but the instant I tried to get it out they divined my purpose and made a concerted rush which kept both my hands busy. I swung my heavy stick with all the fencing skill I possessed, and at first beat them back. But while three of them held me in play from the front, the one whose wrist I had lamed crept up from the side and all but hamstrung me. I avoided him by a quick leap, and gave him a smash on the head that put him definitely out of the fighting.

As a result the others became more cautious. They pressed me closely all the time, so that I might have no chance to draw my pistol, and they began to push me back toward where their comrade lay, evidently hoping to trip me up over his body. But I saw their plan and tried to fight it off. Once I made a short dash at them, but they countered so skilfully that one actually slashed my coat sleeve to ribbons, and I barely got my back against the fountain in time.

By now, too, I was winded from the extreme physical exertion required to face the onslaught of all three at once. I began to realize that it was only a question of minutes before they would wear me down. Desperately I tried to press the fight to them; but they were clever enough to retreat before me, always endeavoring to entice me from my vantage point against the fountain so that they might attack me front and rear, in which case my resistance would soon be ended.

I became so tired that I could barely swing my stick. My last hope was gone. The only thought I had was to force the ruffians to the bitter end, and if possible, kill one of them. Up to this time I had husbanded my breath. Now I called for help as loudly as I could, not really expecting an answer, but in hopes that it might frighten my assailants. I had not called three times, though, when my cry was echoed from the crooked lane out of which the assassins had chased me. My ear caught the sound of running feet, and an instant later came a shrill cry:

"The gendarmes! The gendarmes!"

THE three scoundrels who were circling around me hesitated only a moment. Then, without a glance at their unconscious comrade, they disappeared in the shadows of the Mosque and the noise of their fleeing footsteps died away in the night. Breathless and exhausted, I started forward to meet my rescuers, expecting to see some of the gendarmerie. Imagine my surprise when a woman ran out into the square and stood looking about her. A pistol flashed in one hand.

"Where are you?" she cried. "Where is Dan Blair?"

"I'm here," I answered, stepping out of the shadow of the fountain. "Who are you?"

"Hélène von Anhalt," she answered. "Did you—— What's that?"

She had almost stumbled over the body of the assassin whom I had disabled.

"Only one of my new friends," I said. "Well, Countess, this is getting to be monotonous."

She paid no attention to me. Instead she pulled a tiny electric flashlight from some pocket of her wrap and examined the man's face.

"I never saw him before," she said. "But he could only have been hired by one man."

"Honestly, now, didn't you stage all this business yourself?" I replied.

As a matter of fact, her presence here at such a time had stirred my curiosity far more than the reasons behind the attempt upon my life.

"You talk like a schoolboy sometimes," she answered curtly. "No, I did not. As I told you once before, I don't fight this way. Have I ever given you cause not to believe me?"

"Not exactly. But you must admit that these adventures of mine always seem to connect in some way with your charming self, Countess."

"That's as may be," she returned. "To a certain extent I've been responsible for what has happened in the past. For that I'm sorry, as you know. But this time you have yourself to thank for what has happened."

"Now what do you mean by that?"

She fairly spat out a French ejaculation of impatience, a trick she had which always made me suspect her ancestry was not Austrian.

"Did you never hear of a man named Gortcheff?" she demanded. "Well, you made the great mistake of not killing Gortcheff when you had a fair chance. Now, Gortcheff has made up his mind to kill you at the earliest opportunity.

"I was walking through the Public Gardens some time ago and I saw you pass. Just as you turned out of the gate a group of men slunk after you. I thought they looked suspicious, and when they followed you into the old quarter I trailed them. I was a fool to do it because you will only accuse me of spying on you, where you would get down on your knees to thank another woman."

There was no anger in her voice as she said these last words, only an intense bitterness. A hint of starshine had sifted into the middle of the square where we stood, and by its dim light I saw the woman's face. She had nothing of the siren about her in this moment—only a kind of hurt, bewildered expression that makes all women look alike. I forgot poor little Bobbie Cartwright and other stories as bad; I forgot the Orient Express, the ball at the British Ministry, the months I spent in Hilmi Bagtchi.

"Look here," I said abruptly. "You are wrong. I'm not that much of a rotter. You've saved my life and I appreciate it. We're on opposite sides, and your friends aren't my friends; but—— Will you shake hands? This is the second distinct favor you've done me, and I fancy I'll have to cross off the times you tried to double cross me. That's fair, isn't it?"

She gave me her hand limply. I think she was surprised. At any rate she gulped audibly.

"Th—thank you," was all she said.

"And now I think we had better be dusting out of here," I went on. "This is no place to stay in any longer than one has to."

It sounds preposterously funny, of course, but I escorted her quite ceremoniously to the side gate of the Austrian Ministry—the side gate was her idea, and really a delicate thought.

"I know you are not afraid of being seen with me," she remarked. "But it will save you from making explanations to your friends."

"Shall I see you again, Countess?" I asked as I bade her good night.

"I shall probably be here some time," she answered quietly.

"Humph! Have you another big job on?"

She laughed mockingly in her old way.

"Do you still think you have beaten Austria? Why, we haven't shown our trump cards yet."

Then before I could answer she came a step nearer and caught me by the lapel of my coat.

"Watch Gortcheff," she whispered insistently. "Be on your guard all the time. Be careful on your way home tonight. Make your friends take better care of you. I can't look after you all the time. I'm not paid for that."

With a bitter laugh she swung on her heel and entered the gate. The rest of that evening I spent trying to determine what makes the difference between a good woman and a bad woman, if we accept the usual arbitrary social classifications.

CHAPTER XX

I BEARD THE CZAR

"AND so you walked back with her?" said Masoya.

"Yes," I answered sheepishly.

Without actually saying anything to that effect Masoya managed to convey to me the impression that she was sorry for me, as a confiding, inexperienced young man who could be lured by any petticoat.

"What else could I do?" I added half defiantly. "She practically saved my life, didn't she?"

"I dare say," agreed Masoya. "And she had no ulterior motives, of course."

I looked at her sharply.

"What ulterior motives could she have had?"

"I did not say she had any." Masoya smiled sweetly. "Did she pump you?"

For the first time I became angry.

"What do you take me for?" I demanded. "A schoolboy?"

"Oh, no; merely a chivalrous young man. But it really is disconcerting—at least, I should think it would be disconcerting—the way that woman follows you around."

This rather stung me and seemed to me unfair, so I came back smartly.

"She did say my friends should take better care of me," I remarked.

Masoya's eyes flashed.

"Did she? I suppose you agreed with her?"

"Look here," I remonstrated. "What's the use of quarreling about this? You may believe me or not, as you choose; but I did not enjoy the position I was in. Yet I could not leave her alone in the old quarter to go home by herself, after——"

"I suppose she would have had more trouble getting out of the Turkish Quarter than she had getting into it," said Masoya coldly.

Here I lost my temper quite completely. My normal relations with Masoya were maddening enough in themselves; I was always under the necessity of keeping a check-rein on myself. And now to have her flick me in the raw in this fashion was the finishing touch to a disagreeable morning.

"There is no use in arguing with you until you have made up your mind to be fair," I said as coldly as she had spoken. "You are making a great deal out of a very small incident."

Having said which I got up and went into the minister's study, oblivious even of a whine for recognition from Stoyan. The minister met me with a pleasant smile.

"Ha! Another thundercloud," he commented. "Have you been passing an unpleasant hour with Masoya? Do not mind it, Dan. She is in a sad state of mind, poor girl. The Czar was not very nice to her last night."

A wave of compunction submerged my passion and I started toward the door without even answering him.

"Stop! Stop!" he called. "Don't you know anything about women, Dan? That is not the way to end a quarrel. Wait a while. Let the regret for the angry words sink deep. Seriously, though, sit down here a minute. His Majesty is hinting that he wants to see you."

"Well, he'll have to more than hint," I returned gruffly.

"Quite right." He nodded approvingly. "Make him move first. I haven't the slightest idea what he wants, Dan. Frankly, in the last few days some barrier seems to have come between my sovereign and myself. What it is I don't yet know; but I do know that the—Austrians are behind it.

"Gribaieff and the radicals of the Left seem to be stealing into favor. Not that it is they who are pushing me out." He laughed scornfully in his grand, old-world manner—languidly, with a touch of haughty disdain.

"The Anhalt was inclined to be boastful last night," I said.

"I dare say. Austria plays a deep game. We are giving them the scare of their history, Dan. Not since Kossuth was crushed have the Hapsburgs stood so near annihilation. And they know it. They will fight to the last ditch. But what will they do?"

Before I could answer him there came a timid knock on the door.

"Come in, Masoya," called the minister, with a laugh.

The door opened slowly and Masoya fairly crept into the room, with the guilty manner of a penitent little child.

"I have been perfectly horrid to Mr. Blair," she said, "and before I go away I want to tell him so and ask him to believe that I spoke only in pique."

I jumped to my feet.

"Nonsense; stuff and nonsense!" I stammered. "You—you—have a per—perfect right to—to——"

The minister strolled off to his inner office with a chuckle.

"Strange," he flung over his shoulder, "but I have a sudden feeling that I am *de trop*."

WE WERE both of us glad to be alone, I think. After the months of repression we had passed through there was need for a brief let-up, a period of honesty between our two selves, in which the facts might be faced and readjusted.

"I—I don't want you to think I don't understand," she said at last. "But everything has seemed to go wrong lately, just as I thought we had won. And when you told me about that woman saving your life, Dan, it—it seemed as if it was the last straw. I just thought how—how did she dare?"

Her voice trailed off in a tired little wail, and without stopping to think twice I put my arm around her and pulled her head down on my shoulder.

"It made me almost as angry as it did you," I told her. "But we won't think about it any more. Is it getting harder to carry out your plan?"

"Not—not much harder," she answered, with a suspicion of a sniffle. "But I keep wondering if it's worth while. And last night Ferdinand practically told me I must not take too much upon myself."

A wild wave of hope surged through my heart.

"Do you think he has given up the idea of—of——"

I did not know just how to put it.

"You mean about the prince and me? No, Dan, honestly I don't; and it's about that I want to speak to you."

She pushed me down into a deep leather armchair and sat on the arm of it beside me, running her fingers through my hair in a curiously detached manner while I held her free hand.

"There is nothing you can accomplish by staying in Sofia any longer," she said, after a pause. "What you came to effect has been done. Don't you think you had best go back to America and learn to forget about me? No, don't answer too hastily. Think it over, Dan.

"If you stay, how will it profit you? You will experience greater heartburn and much danger. For there is danger for you here, Dan. You must not forget that. Some men hate you. Gortcheff will have you killed if he possibly can. Don't you see there is nothing you can gain by staying?"

"Will you tell me one thing?" I said between clenched teeth. "Can I possibly help you if I stay?"

"What can I say to that?" she replied helplessly. "Do you think I want you to stay to help me at the risk of your life?"

"You haven't answered my question," I returned doggedly.

"I don't know, Dan," she said gravely. "It might be that I should need your help above everything else. Yet if I should ever be the cause of anything happening to you, I think that it would break my heart."

"That settles it," I said, and stood up. "Nothing is going to happen to me—and I shall stay."

Before she could answer me the minister bustled back into the room.

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish," he exclaimed, exhibiting a sheaf of papers. "A set of directions to go to the delegates at the peace-conference in London. They are instructed to represent to the Allies that the territorial compensation of Bulgaria should be larger than what her allies wish to assign to her, on the ground that we have borne the brunt of the war."

"Madness!" gasped Masoya.

"What is to be done?" I asked.

"Whatever can be done to checkmate this mad idea and undermine the Austrian influence. By the way, Dan, a message came from the Palace with these papers, that you were expected to attend a private audience at three this afternoon. You had best go and do all you can to dissuade Ferdinand from ruining himself."

THAT day for the first time an element of discord crept into the festivities celebrating the end of the war. The newspapers and the people who read them, as well as the street-corner orators, began to talk about double-dealing allies who had loaded all the work on Bulgaria's shoulders and then claimed the major portion of the spoils.

"The thousands of our dead at Kirk Kilisse, at Lüle Burgas, at Tchataldja, at Adrianople call out to us for an adequate recompense for the price they paid for the fatherland," proclaimed the orators. "The Greeks must give up Salonika."

By nightfall men who had been acclaiming their allies as brothers the day before were denouncing the Servians and Greeks for rogues and cheats, who were willing to climb to power over the dead of Bulgaria and the efforts of the Armies of the Lion.

My short ride to the Palace that afternoon was an object-lesson of the efficacy of the venom which Austrian intrigue had sown broadcast through the city. But I strove to keep myself under control and to mask my feelings behind a courteous demeanor, for I knew that in a way my audience with the Czar constituted the forlorn hope of our cause. It might be that I could yet win him over from this course.

Indeed, as my mind grappled with the various phases of the problem, it seemed as if no man with common sense could controvert the arguments I had prepared with the assistance of the minister and Masoya. Moreover there was one other argument, most potent of all, which I possessed and was determined to use. I had little doubt that the object behind my summons was Ferdinand's desire of assurance of funds.

As on the occasion of my previous call, I was ushered into the royal study on the second floor, and presently his Majesty stumped in on his cane, more rheumatic than ever in consequence of nights under canvas during the recent campaign. He greeted me pleasantly enough, suavely grateful for what he was pleased to call my "invaluable assistance in the nation's time of need," said some civil things about the hardships of my captivity—his eyes flitting over my face from feature to feature the while, seeking to read my inward thoughts—and finally came down to brass tacks when he discovered that I refused to open the subject.

"You have been so generous in assisting us in the past, Mr. Blair," he began, "that my ministers seem to find it perfectly natural to go first to you when the prospect of new difficulties arises."

"What new difficulties does your Majesty refer to?" I asked.

He hemmed and hawed.

"As you have heard," he finally proceeded, "on the advice of my counsellors I have ordered that my delegates at the Peace Conference be instructed to bring pressure to bear upon our allies to grant us additional compensation for our extraordinary efforts in the war."

"You never received such counsel from your confidential minister," I said bluntly.

His eyelids flickered momentarily, but almost instantly he concealed his feelings.

"Much as I esteem Kurtsky's advice," he answered calmly, "I occasionally listen to others. It has seemed to me that the suggestions I have acted upon in this matter have been founded upon solid wisdom. The expenditures my people have been forced to make have far exceeded the joint expenditures in men and money of our allies. Naturally, then, we should receive compensation in proportion to them. I feel sure our allies will listen to reason in the matter."

"Is your Majesty proposing to borrow money for the purpose of publishing tracts to persuade them of the righteousness of these demands?" I asked.

This time he frowned at me.

"You are pleased to be facetious, Mr. Blair," he said coldly. "As you must be aware, in a matter such as this it is well to be prepared for emergencies. With your kind assistance we shall be in a position to convince our allies of the justice of our demands. As you also know, war nowadays is a question of money primarily. My treasury has been subject to extraordinary strains. Now what I have to suggest is that the loan of one hundred and twenty-five million francs, which you offered us in the event of a continuation of hostilities with Turkey, be actually consummated without any restriction as to its use."

"Your Majesty fails to take into consideration the fact that the loan in question was offered by American business men largely as a humanitarian measure," I returned. "If it had not been for the belief that it would operate to terminate hostilities and to insure the blessings of enlightened rule to some millions of downtrodden peasants, I could never have persuaded American financiers five thousand miles away to sink their money in the business of slaughtering men. I speak positively and with finality when I say that they would never permit the execution of a loan for the purpose of promoting warfare between allied Christian nations."

"You are dallying with theories, Mr. Blair," he answered impatiently. "Humanitarianism is all very well in its way, but it is not humanitarian to stand in the way of a nation's progress. The destiny of Bulgaria is to dominate the Balkans, and here we have been provided with an ideal opportunity to assert that destiny."

"You already are assured of a larger share of the spoils than any of the other allies," I said. "What more do you want?"

"We must satisfy Roumania—or at least my ministers say we must," he asserted. A shrewd look crept into his face. "I think otherwise. But at any rate, the Roumanian demands make another good excuse for our demands at the Peace Conference. We can say to Greece and Servia: 'Roumania wishes to take a slice off our own territory as payment for having left us alone. It is only fair that you should make this good to us. Give us Salonika and a slice of Macedonia, as far as the Vardar valley.' You see, it is a splendid excuse."

"And does your Majesty believe that after such treatment as you suggest your allies will still continue to entertain the project of crowning you Emperor of the Balkans?" I demanded.

To my surprise he did not flinch.

"That is a matter which will take care of itself. In fact, it is inevitable. I may say, too, in this connection, that I am assured of powerful backing in pursuing the policy I have outlined to you."

"I suppose you are referring to Austria," I said with a feeling I could not conceal. "Well, your Majesty, you have sat upon this throne now for more than twenty-five years, and if you have not yet learned the measure of Austrian diplomacy I can not teach it to you. But you must know that if there is one thing the Hapsburgs dread it is the foundation of a powerful Slav confederation on their southern frontiers. If there is one thing they want to prevent it is that. Bulgaria will never receive disinterested help from Vienna."

Again, to my surprise, he did not show the anger and resentment I expected from my exceedingly frank and democratic language. Instead he leaned over closer to me, tapping the floor with his heavy stick.

"Ah, but you must give me credit for something, Mr. Blair," he replied. "I deal with Austria wittingly, and in the long run it is Austria that will be fooled, not I. I shall play into Austria's hands only so far as it profits Bulgaria.

"Come, look at the situation as it is. We profit by Austria's backing and influence at the present. Grant that she withdraws her help when she thinks we need it most. Then we fall back upon you. With your loan of one hundred and twenty-five million francs, we shall be independent of Austria and every other Great Power.

"We have four hundred thousand veterans under arms, compared with two hundred and fifty thousand Servians and one hundred and fifty thousand Greeks; perhaps a few more—what does it matter? We are a single nation, united in ambition and purpose; they are two peoples of different language. The result can never be in doubt for a minute if we have sufficient financial resources."

"And while you are engaged with Greece and Servia, what do you suppose Roumania and Turkey will be doing?" I asked sarcastically.

"Turkey is crippled," he answered, imperturbably satisfied with his own logic. "Roumania dares not move without the approval of both Austria and Russia."

I got to my feet.

"Once and for all, I must tell your Majesty that you can not count upon my assistance in this project," I said. "It spells ruin—ruin for everything and for everybody connected with it. Have I your Majesty's permission to withdraw?"

He glared at me with ill-suppressed rage. For an instant I thought he would move to strike me with his cane, but by a violent effort he regained control of himself.

"Go!" he gasped thickly. "I am sufficiently rewarded for admitting an American adventurer to my confidence!"

I bowed and walked out of the room, conscious that his eyes were boring into my back.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WAR OF THE BRETHREN

AGAINST the background of those tumultuous days the affairs of individuals seem insignificant as the infinitesimal strokes of the artist's brush that supply the detail to a gigantic canvas. The actors in that mighty Balkan drama were swept up and carried along on seas of human passion and racial hatred that baffled man's control.

The first war of the allies against Turkey was one of the most desperate waged in modern times. But in the second war, in which the allies turned upon each other like starving wolves, and Turkey and Roumania, like jackals, hung on the outskirts of the fray to pick up the scraps dropped by the combatants, the din of contending armies, the tramping of hostile hosts, the scourge of hunger and suffering, surpassed anything dreamed of before.

It was an object-lesson of the destructive effects of greed, not only upon the individual but upon humanity in the mass. A small handful of men and women in Sofia fought to avert the calamity, foreseeing exactly what would happen—the disintegration of the confederation they had labored to construct in order that the Balkan peoples might once more be able to raise their voices in the councils of Europe and inspire the Great Powers with respect. Their efforts were backed up to some extent by other groups in Belgrade and Athens, while in Bucharest and Constantinople the jackals sat outside the range of the firelight and thumped their tails expectantly, waiting for hell to break loose and give them the chance they craved.

But against them was ranged the weight of Austrian diplomacy and the thirst for power of Czar Ferdinand. Vassili Kurtsky, despite the ingratitude with which he had been treated after a lifetime spent in the service of the dynasty, despite even the open usurpation of his power at the royal council-table by his rabid enemies of the Left, labored as no other man could have labored to make Ferdinand see his error and change his policy before it was too late.

Masoya, too, was active in the attempt to shift the course of events. Strangely, after my interview with the Czar, she seemed to regain her influence over him—because he hoped, through her, to obtain a new hold upon me, according to old Kurtsky.

At any rate, alone of all of us, Masoya persisted in believing that all might yet end well. She persisted in this belief in the face of the gradual dissolution of the bonds that held our delegates in sympathy with those of the other allied states at the Peace Conference; in face of the unrest which developed in Greece in consequence of the iteration and reiteration of Ferdinand's claim to Salonika; in face of the growing nervousness of Servia, and the menacing insistence of Roumania's demands for compensation for having done none of the work; aye, in face of the growing exultation in Constantinople, where the warlike party of the Young Turks already perceived the chance to rehabilitate themselves for the losses of the campaign in Thrace.

Great events move slowly. So week after week slipped by in fruitless nogotiations, demands and answers, claims and counter-claims, pourparliers and representations—all of the tedious machinery which diplomacy employs as a preliminary to war.

More than once it looked as if affairs might be adjusted. But every time Kurtsky and his friends of the Moderate party gained an advantage—as when they had all but induced Ferdinand to accept Russia's offer of mediation—Sofia would suddenly swarm with Austrian spies and agents, and Hélène von Anhalt would find it necessary to make hurried trips to Vienna. The end was always the same.

They said one thing that determined Ferdinand in his obstinacy was my continued presence in Sofia. He seemed to think that so long as I stayed on there was reason to believe that I would weaken in the long run and grant him his much-desired loan. He as much as hinted this to Masoya, not once, but twice; and although she gave him scant satisfaction in return, he clung to it with persistence.

It was pathetic to see how Masoya tried to believe in him where all her friends were convinced to the contrary. You must remember that the dream of her life was at stake, for the accomplishment of which she had worked with every ounce of energy in her.

It made me groan to watch her throw herself into the fight every day, worn out with anxiety, conscious that she must distrust all those who were nominally on her side. She grew pale and thin and wan, until I was ready to wish that she might meet with the success she sought.

It was toward the beginning of June, I think, that we heard Savoff had been called back from Adrianople, where he had established his headquarters so that he might keep an eye upon the huge Turkish armaments which still crammed the camps behind the Tchataldja Lines. This could mean but one thing—a council of war. And both the minister and myself were surprised when Savoff called upon us early the following day.

The bluff old war-horse looked worried and made no bones about admitting that the situation did not appeal to him.

"I have come here to get the straight facts," he said without any prefatory remarks. "Before I go to his Majesty I want to know just how it looks to you."

Kurtsky blocked it out for him, gave him the history of the various diplomatic moves, sketched the sentiment prevailing in the surrounding countries, summed up the influence behind the Austrian intrigue, cited the disgust at Ferdinand's policy which was spreading in Russia, and wound up by alluding to the Roumanian mobilization which had called three hundred and fifty thousand men to the colors.

"Aye, aye," said Savoff impatiently. "I can admit all that. The General Staff at this moment reports that the Servians have increased their troops actually under arms to two hundred and seventy-five thousand men, and the Greeks have done what we did not dream they could do—they have two hundred and fifty thousand men in Macedonia and Epirus. That gives them five hundred and twenty-five thousand men to our four hundred thousand.

"Counting the Roumanians, they have eight hundred and fifty thousand. Counting the Turks, they have one million one hundred and fifty thousand. But that is not so bad. I do not consider myself a Frederick the Great, mark you, but still I think much might be done against these separate armies, disjointed as they are. It needs only a smashing success at the opening of the campagin, and the spirit of the rest will be gone.

"But how am I to gain a smashing success without money? What do you say to that Mr. Blair? You came to our rescue once before. Are you standing back of us now?"

"I'm sorry, General," I answered. "I'm more sorry than I can say. But I warned his Majesty more than two months ago that he could expect no assistance from me in such a campaign as he proposes."

"That's final?" asked Savoff curtly.

"It's more than final, if such a thing can be," I returned.

"Well," he said slowly. "And it means my country's doom." He sat silent for several minutes while the minister and I looked sorrowfully away. "I'm not superhuman, Mr. Blair," he resumed at last. "I can't fight a modern war without ammunition and supplies. We have barely fifty rounds of field artillery ammunition to the piece. The infantry have the cartridges in their pouches and what little there is left in the reserve depots.

"Many of the heavy guns are hopelessly fouled. Our cavalry is only half mounted. Our transport has crumbled to pieces under the strain it has been subjected to. We are helpless without money. Only a miracle could pull us through."

"The sinews of war," murmured the minister softly.

"What shall you do, General?" I asked as he rose.

"Do?" he repeated mechanically. "I shall tell his Majesty that I do not approve his plan. What else can I do?"

Kurtsky and I looked at each other as the door closed upon him.

"Let us pray that this man who is beyond suspicion may save the day at the last minute," said the minister.

"God grant it," I answered fervently.

But two hours later Masoya crept in, gray-faced and hollow-eyed, to report that after a stormy council of war at the Palace Savoff had handed the Czar his resignation.

"They talk of Dimitrieff to succeed him," she added.

"One man or another; what does it matter?" said the minister. "The end will be the same."

"But it can't be the end—the end you mean," cried Masoya vehemently. "What? After all we have gone through? After all we have accomplished? It is Bulgaria's destiny to succeed, to achieve! Greece and Servia must yield in the long run, and then Roumania will back water."

"If you only believed in it yourself, my dear," said the minister mournfully.

She looked at him a moment, then burst into tears and left the room.

THE next day the Bulgarian armies in Thrace fronting the Tchataldja Lines were withdrawn. The situation on the Servian and Macedonian frontiers was too tense to permit their retention in this position, especially since peace had been signed with Turkey, and according to international usage Bulgaria had no more to fear from the Turks. But it was a long, weary march across the hills and mountain ranges of Thrace, Macedonia and Southern Bulgaria; and in the absence of sufficient rail transportation to accommodate them all, it required a week or more to get the troops into their new positions.

Then came another delay. Russia had renewed her offers of mediation, and for a space it seemed as if he might yet accept and save himself and his country the awful humiliation that impended.

But while the diplomats haggled and bargained, the Bulgarian armies were halted, and their exact destinations, which had been carefully concealed from the Servian and Greek scouts, became known to all. This meant that the Bulgars had thrown away their last advantage. What follows is what men call history.

In the dull, stifling heat of late June, Dimitrieff hurled his scanty forces at the connecting link between the Greek and Servian armies, the village of Ghuevgheli and the heights that surround it, hoping to cut them in two and then turn on the flank of each and smash them to atoms. The strategy was well devised, and as a matter of fact the plan came within an ace of succeeding. A few more rounds of shrapnel for his artillery, a few more reserves to throw against the positions he failed to carry, and Dimitrieff would have won. For a week the battle raged indeterminedly. Then sheer weight of numbers and lack of ammunition told. The Bulgarian regiments that had never known defeat began to retreat.

The roar of the pursuing guns drew nearer and nearer to Sofia. We who had gone out into the southwestern mountains to listen to the combat raging far off across the frontier found as we returned toward the capital that the thunder of the artillery kept pace with us—sure sign of a relentless pursuit. It was then that the Roumanian jackals, seeing the Bulgarian Lion beaten to its knees, decided they might risk the offensive. There were no soldiers to oppose their advance across the Danube. Every Bulgarian under arms had been rallied to the defense of Sofia.

After this no one was much surprised at the news that the Turks had advanced from Tchataldja, brushing back the thin line of Bulgarian pickets that were the only force between the lines and Adrianople. Yet in the streets men wept with rage at the thought that the great fortress, which so many thousands of Bulgarians had died to win, might again fall into the hands of the infidels.

It could not be. People refused to believe that God could be so unkind. But Providence was determined to test the Bulgars with exceeding bitterness. Enver Bey and his Nizams swept down upon Adrianople—denuded of troops, its magazines empty—and occupied the gaping circle of forts without any opposition.

By now, however, the Bulgars' case was too desperate for them to think over-much of Adrianople's loss. It was a question of saving Sofia, of preserving the capital itself, around which four hostile armies were welding a far-flung circle of steel. Panic broke out. Men and women fled through the streets seeking means of escape. But how could they escape? Only one path lay open, and that was by way of the Black Sea ports—and presently the Roumanian cavalry had cut this route.

Sofia, like Paris in the Winter of 1870-71, lay as helpless as a sprawling giant, hemmed in behind her impassable barrier of hills. It was impossible even to telegraph any appreciable distance out of the city. Communication was feasible only so far as the farthest Bulgarian bayonets.

Into this turmoil I rode with the little squad of dispatch-bearers and aides who brought back to the Czar the official news that the campaign had failed and that the only recourse left was submission. For of what avail was continued resistance without cartridges to shoot at the invaders? Men might be willing to die in defense of the homeland, yet no man could be expected to want to die, knowing that he had no chance to hurt his enemies, that all he had to expect was to be shot down by men he could not see. Bulgaria was beaten. The proud land of the Lion, which had emerged victorious from every previous venture of her brief career, was prostrate before foes outnumbering her three to one.

I knew it; the dispatch-bearers knew it. They who had seen whole batteries of field artillery captured with the gunners standing with arms folded, motionless beside their pieces, because they had no more ammunition, not even for the revolvers in their holsters—they had no illusions. Yes, they knew; and they rode like men who had lost all hope as we parted company in Palace Square—they to bear their tale of disaster to the Czar, I to tell Masoya that her dream of empire was ended.

Perhaps that was why I was not altogether unhappy. Selfish, you say? Possibly. Yet I defy any man to be wholly unselfish, placed as I was. After all, what was Bulgaria, what was the whole Slav race to me, compared with this woman? Nothing. They did not count.

I knew now that my fervor in their cause, personal though it had been in the beginning and founded on my old love of this gallant little land, had become entirely merged with my love for her, for her own brave, true personality. Oh, it hurt me to think that her dream was ended. At the time I was not sure, but now I know that I would have helped her carry out her plan as far as I conscientiously could, had it been possible. If it made her happy that would have been enough. I would have done anything, gone to any lengths, sacrificed myself in any way, to gain that end.

* * *

SO I pondered as I rode down Czar-Liberator Street toward the Kurtsky villa, joyful, withal, that my message would absolve me from any such Spartan obligations. For the defeat of Bulgaria meant undeniably the failure of Ferdinand's far-fetched plan of a Balkan Empire, and conversely the collapse of the contemplated marriage of Masoya to the prince. I knew she would never consent to it now that there was nothing material to be gained for the people she always looked upon as her people, but I had the decency to veil my feelings at sight of the tense looks on the faces of Masoya and old Kurtsky who met me at the door.

"Well?" said the minister.

"It's over," I answered.

He walked to a window and stood with his back toward me for several moments. Masoya fronted me, eyes wide opened, lips parted, as if she had not gathered the full import of the words.

"Surely, you suspected—from the firing," I said gently.

"You—you mean—there is—no hope?" she faltered.

"None," I said—and there was no exultation in my voice. "It has been recommended his Majesty to appeal to the Powers to intervene. We are beaten—hopelessly beaten. If there was more ammunition—even if there was a cause to inspirit the men—it might be different. As it is—there is no hope."

Her face went gray all of a sudden, and she swayed so that I feared she might fall. I caught her and held her in my arms.

"Sweetheart!" I muttered. "Sweetheart, I'd give anything if it could be otherwise."

And I swear at the minute I meant it, every word of it.

"Oh, no, no!" she sobbed, burying her face in my shoulder. "I'm glad, so glad. More glad than I can say. I knew it wasn't right all along. If we had won I should have felt the blood of those poor slaughtered boys choking me all the rest of my life. But I wouldn't admit it, though I knew it was wrong. I wouldn't admit it—and now God has saved me!"

The minister gave up staring out of the window at this point.

"I fancy you two are the only people who will make anything out of this mess," he commented dryly over his shoulder. "Well, I'm glad something has been saved from the wreck. Hullo!"

An automobile driven at reckless speed swung into the driveway and brought up with a jerk under the *porte-cochère*. From it leaped a woman who tore open the hall door and burst in upon us without the formality of ringing. She was Hélène von Anhalt.

She closed the door carefully and stood with her back against it, breathing heavily.

"I don't suppose I'm a welcome guest here," said the Countess von Anhalt calmly, addressing herself strictly to me. "And I'm not a bearer of good news. So I thought I wouldn't give you a chance to shut me out, Mr. Blair. Ferdinand believes that you are the sole cause of what has happened, and at this moment he is writing out an order for your arrest."

CHAPTER XXII

OVER THE HILLS TO GIPSY LAND

THE MINISTER and I stood gaping at her like yokels. It was Masoya who met the situation.

"Are you sure of your information, Countess?" she asked.

"I have just come from the Palace," replied the Anhalt. "I tell you you have no time to spare—if you wish to escape. And that applies to you, too, *Guspojita* Vavaroff."

"What do you mean?" I exclaimed.

Hélène von Anhalt smiled slowly as she answered.

"It seems that Gortcheff hates the *Guspojita* Vavaroff as much as he does you," she said. "At any rate, he has poisoned the Czar's mind against you both. God knows what he has said. I don't. But it suffices that he has made his Majesty believe that the two of you have deliberately plotted this disgrace which has overtaken him."

The minister had not spoken a word up to now, but he had kept his head better than any of us.

"I will have my car here in a minute," he said coolly, as he reached for a telephone. "Masoya, get your wraps ready. I will also call Boris on the 'phone. He is in command at the Guards Barracks. He will——"

"I telephoned Colonel Kurtsky before I left the Palace," interposed Hélène von Anhalt. "He understands the situation and he is galloping here with as many troopers as he can muster."

The minister gave her an admiring glance.

"You are a woman of resource, Countess," he remarked. "Boris will not let a little thing like an order from the Czar prevent him from protecting these two from arrest."

"But you must hurry!" the Countess insisted. "You can not wait for Colonel Kurtsky or to lay formal plans. You must be away at once. Never mind your automobile. Take mine. It is ready. If Gortcheff gets here first you will both be dead before help can come."

Even while she was speaking she ran to a closet and snatched from it an armful of wraps.

"Come!" she commanded, flinging open the entrance door.

We followed her meekly, because in this tense moment of action Hélène von Anhalt, our enemy, whom we had every right to mistrust, made us instinctively feel that she knew what was best.

She ordered the driver out of his seat and pushed Masoya into his place.

"The man is an employe of our Ministry," she explained briefly. "Best not to take chances with him. Besides, I dare say you are a better driver."

She swung around on me.

"Have you money?"

"I have a beltful of gold; it should be enough," I answered.

"Then jump in and be off," she cried. "Oh, hurry! Hurry!"

"But look here," I protested. "This has been uncommonly decent of you, Countess. What——"

"Call it pique, personal indulgence, treason to my friends, inherent deceit, anything you like," she said. "Only please don't waste valuable time."

"But how about yourself?" I insisted. "Gortcheff will be angry enough to shoot you. And how about your friends at the Austrian Ministry? You had best——"

She laughed a bit wildly.

"My dear Mr. Blair," she said mockingly, "don't worry yourself about Hélène von Anhalt. She has been used to looking out for herself in the past, and a little thing like this won't bother her. Rest easy. I've been in many a worse hole—and with less reason to be proud of myself."

"But I don't understand," I said blankly.

Masoya leaned across me and snapped the side door shut.

"I understand, Madame von Anhalt," she said, and to my surprise her voice was very kind. "God bless you."

But I was even more surprised at the tears that sprang into Hélène von Anhalt's eyes. She started to say something, but the words seemed to choke in her throat; and at this very moment old Kurtsky, standing at the head of the steps, shouted a warning.

"A troop of gendarmes has just ridden out of the Palace gateway," he cried. "Don't let them head you off."

MASOYA, with a single glance over her shoulder, pushed in the clutch and snapped the gear lever into high speed. The touring-car slid forward easily over the smooth gravel roadway, rounded the gatepost on two wheels and struck the straight stretch of the highroad leading out of the city toward the southwest, the Dubnitza Road.

Behind us, riding furiously in a cloud of dust came a whole troop of mounted men whom we distanced easily. But to my chagrin, before we had gotten very far toward the city limits, I spied a second and somewhat larger troop, of about a squadron's strength, coming up on our left hand through one of the outlying streets that led to the barracks east of the city.

I pointed them out to Masoya, suggesting that we swing to the right; for I was afraid they might open fire upon us, even if they could not intercept us; and I knew a volley at such range would be fatal.

She gripped the steering-wheel a trifle tighter and took her eyes off the road ahead barely long enough to flash a glance at this new factor in the game. A relieved expression crossed her face.

"They are of the Guards!" she shouted, so as to make herself heard above the pounding of our motor. "It must be Boris."

She slowed down; and sure enough, in five minutes good old Boris Kurtsky—who, to his great disgust, had been left behind by

Dimitrieff in command of the reserve cavalry—at the head of a squadron of the Royal Guard, thundered up alongside of us.

"I got a wild message from the Anhalt," he called to us through the dust. "What does it mean?"

"It means what she said," returned Masoya grimly. "Gortcheff has been appointed Military Governor and Dan and I are to be arrested."

"Not while I have anything to say," returned Boris blithely. "It may mean my commission, but I'll be hanged if I give you up to slaughter. What's the plan?"

Now I had not the slightest idea of a plan, and I turned appealingly to the girl beside me. She barely knitted her brows in thought before replying.

"Are we still being followed?" she asked.

Boris turned in his saddle and shouted an order that was repeated down the ranks of our escort. Presently an answer was returned.

"Apparently not," he said cheerfully.

"That is so much to be thankful for," commented Masoya. "I don't think we shall need very much more from you, Boris—unless you feel that you can escort us a few miles farther. And do you suppose you could lose a couple of your best horses?"

"Anything you say," replied Boris, in his odd Robert College English that I have referred to before—we spoke English so that none of the troopers might hear more than was good for him. "I am, as Dan would say, in your hands. You are—how do you say, Dan? Ah, yes, you are the doctor."

We were driving very slowly now, and most of our escort had dropped behind us.

"What is the extent of Ferdinand's utmost sphere of influence around Sofia?" demanded Masoya next.

"In this direction?" answered Boris. "Oh, possibly twenty miles."

"Then, to begin with, we should like to have your escort for twenty miles," said Masoya. "As soon as we are safe from Gortcheff's pursuit we can abandon the car and take two of your horses. You and your men can go back to Sofia and say that you chased us without result, and that all you found was the car empty. Gortcheff will disbelieve you; but that will not do any good, and Ferdinand has too many troubles around him to make trouble for you. So everything will be all right."

Boris looked at her admiringly.

"St. Demetrius, but you are wonderful!" he exclaimed. "And you? What shall you and Dan do with yourselves?"

"Oh, we shall do well enough," returned Masoya. "With horses we can strike off into the frontier country where I have friends; and unless I am very far out of my reckoning, we shall be able to avoid all the armies and make for safety and western Europe."

"It will be risky," said Boris doubtfully. "Do you two realize what you are doing in plunging alone into a country that is being traversed by two hostile armies—for you will have both the Serbs and the Greeks between you and western Europe?"

"You forget that I am an old hand on the frontier," said Masoya. "I know it by heart; and what is better, I know the Gipsy folk. We shall succeed, never doubt."

TWENTY miles from Sofia, at a village just across the mountain barrier which surrounds the capital we halted. Ahead of us the thunder of the Greek and Servian cannon, drawing steadily nearer day by day, almost hour by hour, to the doomed city, sounded alarmingly close. But Masoya was not perturbed; and in face of her calmness, I could not permit myself to seem uneasy, despite the glum face of Boris. We rested at this place overnight; and in the early morning after sunrise parted company with the last of our friends.

There was a husky note in Boris' big trooper's voice when he said good-by, and he did not attempt to conceal his distaste at our venture. But he gave us the two best horses in his squadron, including his own; and he swore that if we were caught he would hew a way for us out of Bulgaria, if he had to trample over the Czar himself.

He walked beside us for half a mile along the road we took, and then pressed both our hands. There was no need to tell him the way we felt toward each other. He knew. In fact, he said with a schoolboy's chuckle, he had known all along.

"Ever since Masoya lost her temper that afternoon at the station when she saw you flirting with the Anhalt," he said slyly, "I saw this coming. I refuse to be surprised. Only I was afraid for a time that Masoya would succeed in making herself a figure of international importance and hopelessly miserable into the bargain. It's a good job things have worked out as they have."

"It is," I said with a solemnity that was born of conviction and the uncertainty of the future.

"And I haven't much doubt you two will get away all right," he went on. "Dan Blair always was a lucky fellow, and Masoya is too clever to be caught. You make a good combination."

By this time we had reached a crossroad where a narrow forest track branched off from the main highway that led on toward Dubnitza. None of the débris of the frontier battles had passed this way, although we could hear the incessant clamor of the guns growling beyond the blue horizon.

"This is our way," said Masoya, indicating the forest track.

"Then it's time to say good-by," replied Boris, and he added, "God bless you both."

Until we had rounded a turn in the trail and placed a wall of Summer greenery between us, he stood there by the crossroads looking after us—a very gallant gentleman and a true friend, who scorned all thought of personal advantage and was willing to risk his commission to save those he loved.

The path we followed led straight into the heart of the well-nigh impenetrable forest which clothes the slopes of the southern Balkans. It was a wild land of tumbling mountains and huge stretches of fir trees and pines, desolate and uninhabited. But scarcely an hour had gone by since we left Boris when I sensed that we were being followed. I told Masoya, and we quickened our pace. The road was rough and positively dangerous here and there, yet we pushed our horses to a gallop and drove them to the limit of their capacity.

So the morning sped by, and for a time I thought we had shaken off the Nemesis that hung to our heels. We let our weary mounts slow down to a walk—and within an hour the sensation of being followed was with us again. By now even Masoya could perceive what at first she had taken my word for. We could not hear anything tangibly at variance with the ordinary woodland noises; but we knew that some one, something, was clinging to our trail with a persistence that would not be denied.

When mid-afternoon came and the suspense still hung over us I made up my mind to end the matter once and for all, for better or worse, before dusk should set in, when we would have more to fear from treachery than in the sunlight.

So we halted in a little valley on the mountain's flank, and withdrew from the trail a short distance into the woods. To any one coming along the trail we were invisible, and each of us carried an automatic which we held ready to use if necessary.

At first the only concrete evidence of the world beyond the hills was the faint booming of cannon, telling of the conflict being waged by three mighty armies; but presently my ear caught a rustling of underbrush, the crackling of leaves and sticks, up the trail we had followed. Masoya heard it too, and drew closer to me. Our horses pricked their ears forward and quivered uncertainly. There could be no doubt that some one was approaching.

Suddenly a dark shape loomed through the trees far down the trail, and I raised my pistol, prepared to fire. Masoya seized my arm just in time.

"Don't shoot, Dan!" she cried. "It's Stoyan!"

Our mysterious pursuer was the great hound we both had good cause to love, and instead of firing I spurred my horse forward into the trail to meet him. But he took scant notice of me. His first thought was for his mistress, and he reared up on his hind legs, a good six feet tall, it seemed, putting his forepaws against her saddle and looking into her eyes as wistfully as a child. Then when she had patted and caressed him, he came over to me for a similar demonstration; yet not quite so effusive, as one who would say—

"Yes, good sir, I love you; but you can not expect to be as my mistress is to me."

Five minutes later we rode on, Stoyan loping beside us, apparently as fresh as if he had rested a whole day. Not far beyond this point the forest ended, and we began to climb the bare upper masses of the hills, a maze of naked black rocks that looked chilly and cold under the Summer sunset. A wind sprang up, too, that sighed and whistled about us as we plunged into a dark defile where it was already twilight.

We had not progressed very far along this rift in the mountain when Stoyan began to growl uneasily and swing his head from side to side. Thinking the danger the dog evidently scented came from behind, I suggested that we go forward at a trot. It was impossible to go faster, both on account of the nature of the ground and of the horses' condition. As we rode on the darkness increased. The defile seemed to lead us down into the bowels of the mountain, and we were compelled to slow to a walk.

Just how it happened I don't know. Both of us were very tired, perhaps half asleep. But Stoyan gave a guttural bark of anger, and I blinked my eyes to see men standing all around us, two of them at the bridles of each horse. They were lean, dark-faced, hook-nosed men, with lank, oily hair and big gold earrings; and they wore gaudy turbans and carried long barreled Martinis in the hollows of their arms, besides an array of revolvers and knives thrust into their voluminous waist-sashes. They stood very close around us, but they did not touch us; and from this I augured a chance of escape.

"Shall we ride right into them?" I said to Masoya. "Stoyan will help, and perhaps we can——"

She shook her head decisively.

"By no means. They are Tziganes. Let me try my hand at them. They are more likely to be friends than enemies."

And she turned to the man with the brightest eyes, the biggest nose, and the longest earrings, and shot a question at him in a rude, barbaric language that sounded like mountain torrents rioting over precipices and the wind through the rocks, a harsh tongue that yet had something hauntingly liquid and musical in its syllables.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HERMIT PRIEST OF KARA DAGH

THE effect of her words was little short of magical. Before she had exchanged half a dozen sentences with him the leader of the band was louting low at her saddlebow, and respect dawned on all the swarthy faces around us. Masoya turned to me with a little laugh.

"All's well, after all," she said. "They are Tziganes of the same tribe as Beran Kokalji whom we know of old. This man—" she indicated the leader, who grinned at her gesture—"is a cousin of Kokalji. They are smugglers, and they are clearing out of Bulgaria because they fear the Greeks who are never friends of the Tziganes. It could not be better. These fellows know all the secret paths of the mountains and they will see us in safety across Servia to the Danube."

Half an hour's ride under the escort of our new friends brought us to their camp in a gorge which shot off at right angles to the one we had been following. Here, deep in the wildest fastnesses of the Balkans, their tents had been pitched and their motley herd of pack mules and ponies was picketed.

Here, too, were their women folk and children, without whom the Tziganes never travel unless they are bent on fighting or marauding of the most desperate character. Also I noted that beside the picket-lines were numerous packs in oilcloth, sure sign of attar of roses or other costly contraband they intended to smuggle to Austria as a side issue of their flight from the path of the Greek armies.

I have already spoken of Masoya's hold over these savage borderers, weird people without acknowledged ruler or God of their own. Her word with them was law. They waited on her as if she were a queen, and they called her by that strange title which was universally accorded her along the frontier, "the Lady of Czarigrad."

The most comfortable tent, the warmest seat by the camp-fire, the choicest bits from the great kettle that stewed over it were hers. And because we were with her, Stoyan and I were made much of and given preference, although either of us alone, I am persuaded, would have stood more chance of having his throat cut.

Both Masoya and I were very tired that night, but before she lay down in the tent that had been set aside for her I asked her that which had been on my mind ever since the steady approach of the hostile cannon had beaten into my brain conviction of Bulgaria's defeat.

Women are consistent—despite what some wiseacres have said. She blushed and hesitated, there in that God-forsaken wilderness; and after much urging on my part, the sum of her opposition was that "it was too short notice."

"And I have only the clothes I stand in, dear," was her final argument.

"But thank goodness they are enough for decency's sake," I answered.

"But how—how could we have it?" she objected.

"Ask your friend the chief, here," I suggested. "If necessary, he can kidnap a priest for us."

"It will be very informal," she said faintly.

"All the better," I agreed. "Don't you think we've waited long enough?"

She stole a look at me out of the corner of her eyes, and I knew that I had won. A shout brought the Tzigane leader to our side, and before she had finished her question he was chuckling and chattering volubly in reply.

"He says there is a hermit priest who has a cell on Kara Dagh, a mountain half a day's journey west of here," translated Masoya. "Do you——"

"I have always wanted to be married by a hermit priest," I protested.

"Oh, if you are going to make fun of it!" she said with a feeble attempt at displeasure.

And then I took her hand and made her look me squarely in the face; and I saw the light dawn in her eyes that I had never seen in any woman's eyes before. For I never was a woman's man; my time was spent among men.

"Ah, Dan, dear Dan," she murmured softly. "We're all alike, we women. We hate to surrender—but when we have to it is the most exquisite sensation of all. I'm glad, Dan; and I want it tomorrow as much as you do."

So the next day the Gipsy caravan escorted us by ravine and gully and cloud-canopied moorland, far from the beaten tracks of man, to the hulking aerie of Kara Dagh, bolstering upward into the blue above the marches of Servia. On the lower levels the rest of the caravan halted, a medley of bizarre colors, yellow, red, green and blue; and with the Chief and one or two others we pushed on to the little shelf of rock where the hermit priest dwelt in a tiny chamber, half chapel, half anchorite's cell that had harbored a priest ever since Methodius and Cyril converted the heathen of this land to Christianity.

The priest must have seen us coming from afar, for he came out to meet us—a picturesque old fellow with a long, sweeping gray beard and high-cast, thoughtful face. No heavy-paunched cloistered friar, but a mountain recluse and student, hard bodied from simple living and clear-eyed from deep thinking.

Well, the story is soon told. He married us there—with a big gold finger-ring I purchased from one of the Gipsies for five napoleons—on the clean summit of the mountain, from which we might look down upon the tumbled peaks of a dozen ranges, high above the haunts of men and their petty strainings and cheatings and ambitions. And we went away from him feeling that no marriage could have been more complete in the things that go to make a marriage all it should be.

The next day, disguised as Gipsies and riding in the center of the band, Masoya and I pressed on with the Tziganes across an unguarded section of the border-line into Servia, where the caravan soon joined itself to the procession of peasants fleeing from the horrors of the war-zone. Then striking northward by obscure tracks, avoiding villages and dodging the scanty gendarmerie patrols—for in Servia, as in Bulgaria, every able-bodied man was under arms at the front, either fighting the Bulgars or struggling to keep a tight grip on the new-won Servian territory in Albania—we steered a course for the Danube.

You may look without avail on your small-scale maps for the village of Gheta on the banks of that river. It is only a collection of huts, or rather hovels; but it is known to fame in the underworld of the Balkans as a point whence contraband of many kinds may be smuggled into the Hapsburgs' dominions—and out of them, too. It is on a barren reach of the great river, with no towns or hamlets on the opposite bank for a number of miles; and the Austrian customs officials—doubtless for reasons of their own—give that vicinity a wide berth.

Therefore Masoya and I met with no undue adventures when, in company with a dozen head of horseflesh that had been accumulated by divers dishonest means in the course of our caravan's wanderings through the territory this side of the Bulgarian frontier, we were shipped onto a flatboat and poled across to Hungary.

Secrecy was necessary—not for any fears for myself, for I was safe once out of Ferdinand of Bulgaria's reach; but on account of Masoya. She would have been a prize for Peter of Servia to hang onto, could he have caught her in his clutches—a constant threat to hold over his brother sovereigns' heads.

We bade good-by to our Tzigane friends with a mixture of sorrow and relief. They were kindly enough and worshiped Masoya with that unexplainable adoration which all the Balkan peasantry seemed to have for her, but they were far from clean. A fifty-mile ride across country took us to a railroad station, and thence we reached Buda-Pest, which considers itself well within the limits of European civilization, and at any rate may be called the outer gateway to Vienna and Paris. Posing as an American professor and his wife, who had been observing political developments in the Balkans, Masoya and I had no difficulty in concealing our identity and passed through Austria without being recognized.

AND so this chapter of adventure was brought to a close. But I can not help thinking that there may be more to add to the story in the future. Letters from old Vassili Kurtsky, who is laboring hard to repair the ruin that he could not avert, and from Boris, who is now a full-fledged general, lie before me as I write.

They hint of far-reaching changes. Bulgaria beaten through the scheming of half a dozen powerful enemies and the stupidity of the policy thrust upon her against her will, has swallowed the bitter pill forced down her throat by Fate. But she is waiting to take her revenge. On whom that revenge will fall first I do not know. Perhaps no man knows definitely save old Kurtsky, and he is too wary to say before it is time.

Yet I think there is a day coming when the Lady of Czarigrad may again be a factor in Balkan affairs. She says otherwise. She wants no more to do with politics, she tells me. She has worry and cares enough at home. But when I speak to her of the gray mass of the towers of that fairy fortress of mystery, Czarigrad, looming over the blue frontier hills of Macedonia, there comes a light to her eyes that is different from that with which she looks at me at other times.

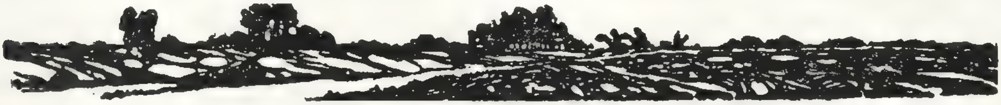
"No, Dan," she laughingly insists, when I twit her on it. "I don't want to go back. Indeed I don't, dearest; and I wouldn't be an Empress for worlds. But I should so like to show you Czarigrad some day."

I wonder. There are times when I should like to make personal acquaintance with the spell of Masoya's fairy castle, when I feel again a gust of primitive anger that such scoundrels as Constantine Gortcheff and Carl von Griffenstein should be alive and plotting; when I long to match my wits against that contradictory person, Hélène von Anhalt and Kemil Bey, if he is still alive, as I have no doubt he is. And above all I should like again—don't think me egotistical—to beard Czar Ferdinand in his Palace.

But more than this I wonder what would have happened had Sasha Kroyevich—I'd like to meet him again, too, for he was a man—failed me there on the river bank at Semlin and allowed me to fall into the hands of the Austrians. It's futile, of course; but still a man who has married and settled down, no matter how contented he may be, can only hark back over the past. I wonder.

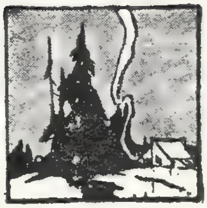
THE END

Editorial Note:—*The European war, like many another crisis in the past, arose in the Balkans. It is this potentiality for history-making that makes them such excellent material for fiction. In "The Sinews of War" the time is set during the war with Turkey and the ensuing war among the allies, with the rest of Europe hovering uneasily on the edge of the combat. The general color may be relied upon, for the author knows the Balkans at first-hand. For the rest, it is fiction pure and simple. Several historical people appear in the tale, but their portraiture is in accordance with the needs of fiction, not with their actual characteristics. Most of the characters are entirely fictional, though some of them have been put into high places. But the spirit of reality is there—the spirit of the Balkans. And the Balkans, for half a century, have been one of the Great Keys to the world's history.*



THE CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE FOR READERS, WRITERS AND ADVENTURERS



THE radio officer of an Atlantic steamship makes a suggestion that may be valuable to some of you. Often a man can not tell where he will be during the next year or more, and has no permanent mail address. Perhaps some of his friends are in a similar fix, possibly where the mails do not carry. Any attempted letters probably end up in the Dead-Letter Office. How keep in touch?

Many of our "Lost Trails" inquiries have such an origin.

All this trouble could be avoided if each of these men knew that a letter addressed to the other in care of *Adventure* would be held till his friend called for it or had it forwarded.

A GOOD suggestion, and *Adventure* offers its services free of charge. We'll handle the matter carefully, but assume no responsibility and reserve the right at any time to receive no more letters and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to the service. We've already been doing this for some of you, and I'm glad to extend the service to any of you under any reasonable circumstances.

Our intentions are not limited to getting fifteen cents from you for a copy of *Adventure*. We're also sincerely anxious to be of practical service to you whenever we can. And we're wide open to suggestions telling us how to do it.

IN ACCORDANCE with Camp-Fire custom, Norman Springer introduces himself along with his first story in our magazine, "For Ways That Are Dark":

> I have always been an eager searcher for adventure. But—must I confess it—wherever I found it, it was hard knocks and short rations, with never a beautiful maiden in sight.
>
> I put in seven years at sea; mostly in stokeholds and engine-rooms. My first two ships, though, were square-riggers. Adventure sent me to sea—and the kindly services of a 'Frisco boarding-master, who shipped three of us innocents in a three-masted bark, with a donkey's breakfast and a box of matches by way of kit for a deepwater passage.
>
> We went to Australia, and I spent about a year and a half in the colonies—on the coast and up-country. My chum and I rambled over a good part of the West Australia "back-blocks" with our swags on our backs. "On the Wallaby" they call it out there.
>
> WE WENT up to the pearling grounds in a little ketch that carried a cargo of dynamite for the mines in the country back of Cossack. Cossack is all that the story "For Ways That Are Dark" depicts —and more. It is the low-downdest place on the face of the earth. You can smell the shell-beds and poogie-tubs thirty miles to sea—farther, if the wind is right.
>
> The story, of course, is pure fiction. But, there was an educated Chinaman, who was notorious on the Coast as an "I. P. B." He went out suddenly, in consequence of an argument he had with a pearler. The day we arrived in Cossack, they held an inquest. The jury was composed of seven pearling skippers and a police constable, and the verdict was justifiable homicide.
>
> WHEN I left Australia, I was in a tramp, passing coal. In the ships I joined afterward, I stuck to the Black Gang; the pay and food was better. I finally wound up in Baltimore in the Fall of 1906.
>
> I shipped in the Navy, then; and the next four years I passed in the fire-rooms and engine-rooms of a battleship. My ship was in the Atlantic Fleet, and I was lucky enough to make the cruise around the world with the "Sixteen" in '07-'09.
>
> My roving is over with now—though my heels do itch occasionally. Nowadays, I take my adventures in black-and-white doses—a good and comfortable substitute as long as *Adventure* appears on the third of every month.

SO MANY responded to the notice from L. E. Custer, Mgr., in the Wanted column some months ago that he soon wrote me he had his quota. As I could not return most of the letters without opening them to learn who the sender was and, of course, had no right to open them, there was nothing to do but let them go on to him. I suggested his replying by form letter, but he may not have done this, so I make this statement here and quote his letter:

> I'm glad to be able to notify you that I have every man advertised for in your magazine Camp-Fire corner, concerning South Sea cruise, and now I state that I am really satisfied with them—could not

find better ones. Please forward me no more answers concerning this advertisement. L. E. Custer

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SINCE we last had a story from him or heard from him at the Camp-Fire, L. Warburton has wandered from our Pacific Coast up through Canada, to the West Indies, England and many other places. At present he's editor of a newspaper in Buenos Aires, South America.

He'd like to hear from the rest of you, through the "Camp-Fire," on the question of a spy's fate in wartime if captured, and on several other points pertaining to spies or members of an "intelligence corps." Here is his own understanding of the situation. How about it?

THE FATE OF THE SPY

A casual reference, in a former number of *Adventure*, to an experience which befell Captain Duquesne in the Boer War, led me into a brief discussion regarding the fate of a spy in war-time, and the remark was passed to me with some surprise, "I always thought the fate of the spy was death?" Well, it used to be so in the days when spies were not dignified by the titles of officers of the Intelligence Corps, and were not treated as honorable combatants.

In all the old European wars, even as late as the Franco-Prussian war of 1871, and, parenthetically I might mention, also in the American Civil War, many men on both sides were captured and shot as spies, and no one who studies war, and understands the rules of the game, can now doubt that these executions of brave men were really unjustifiable murders. I do not know whether the famous Geneva Convention, which laid down a code for observance by civilized powers at war, dealt with the spy question, but it is certain that no humane power at war within the last quarter of a century has made a regular practise of shooting all prisoners who might be called spies. And this brings me up to the point where it is necessary briefly to discuss, "Who and what is a spy?" The question seems too simple to warrant an answer, but in reality there is a wide distinction between a spy and an officer of intelligence, which was not drawn in bygone days.

EVERY army has a department specially organized to obtain accurate and trustworthy information in time of peace about every other nation and country with which it may be involved in war. When the guns begin to shoot, as Kipling puts it, an army's Intelligence Corps is supposed to have equipped its generals with all possible information regarding the enemy's strength, his armaments, his supplies, his strategic plans, and everything else that may be of service. The country over which the enemy will maneuver has been studied and accurately mapped, and if the enemy has been equally cautious, he will have secured similar information about his opponent, and the army which is best equipped with all data is already a long way on the road to victory. During the actual campaign the Intelligence Corps of an army is responsible for keeping the general commanding in constant touch with the movements of the enemy, and this is where the scout begins to work.

HE MAY act singly, or in company with others, and proceed ahead of the army, or to the left or right, ever watchful for the movements of the enemy, and ready to glean information from any and every source. He is a combatant just as much as any other member of the army, and if captured is surely entitled to honorable treatment as a prisoner of war, though in pursuit of his hazardous duty he may penetrate within the enemy's lines. However, in the old days such a man was summarily executed when captured within the lines or near them. The real spy, however, is a different being to the scout. He may be a traitor to his own side, or he may be one of the enemy who performs a task ten times more hazardous than that of the scout. If the former, well, death is the generally acknowledged punishment for treachery in time of war; but if the latter, it is, in my mind, questionable whether even the exigencies of war, which are always pleaded in such cases, warrant his captors in shooting him after a drumhead court-martial; and in the Boer War, which I have in mind while I write, I don't remember any instance where either a Boer or a Britisher was executed as a spy, when it was clear that he was a belligerent.

THE spy, as a rule, is either a rank traitor or a very brave man, and surely the two kinds of men are entitled to different treatment. That is the way most soldiers would look at it. The traitor affects to serve one side, while he is in reality serving the enemy. In the South African campaign we had many such spies in our own lines, and but few of them were caught. They were generally Afrikanders of Cape Colony, who owed allegiance to Britain, and did not hesitate to enlist in her volunteer regiments and take British pay, while in reality they were serving the Boers by conveying to them information they were able to gather because they had the opportunity, and their loyalty was not suspected. How many of the reverses suffered by the British in the early stages of the war were attributable to such traitors can not be accurately stated, but the only explanation of several of the disasters was treachery. Ground over which brigades were to move during night was carefully reconnoitered during the day by the scouts, working under the direction of officers of the Intelligence Corps, all precautions were taken to guard against surprise, and yet when the movement was made under dead of night, with Afrikanders guiding the attacking party, the enemy were found posted at the best possible positions and ready to meet the attack. After the slaughter at Magersfontein, when the Highland Brigade was cut to pieces, several supposedly loyal Dutch were missing from the British ranks. Such men were spies for the Boers and traitors to the British to whom they owed allegiance, and when detected in their treachery were either shot off-hand by an enraged British officer, as General Gatacre is reported to have shot a treacherous guide, when betrayed into an ambush at Stormberg Junction, or were sent to trial before proper courts. In the latter case I think I am right when I say that the punishment was generally imprisonment.

In the ranks of the Boers, of course, there was the counterpart of the spy in the British ranks, Dutch traitors to the Dutch cause, and again there was another class of spy, or traitor if you will, the renegade from the Boer ranks openly fighting with the British, and assisting their generals by his knowledge of the country and the movements of his people. With these men it was just a case of taking sides against their own country, and there was always some deep reason for their having done so. In one case I knew of personally a Boer led our column for months on the heels of a commando, some members of which had mistreated his wife while he was out of the district with another commando. He was a sworn enemy to his own people, because of one of the greatest reasons for hatred. These Dutchmen, serving the British against their own race may have been traitors, but cowards they certainly were not, for their lives were absolutely forfeited if they fell into the hands of the enemy. They ran far greater risks than any Britisher did, and they knew it, and many a desperate race for life have I seen, when a Boer guide, rashly venturing away from the column to glean certain information from a farmhouse, had to ride like a fury from men who would have taken any risk in order to capture him.

THERE is still another class of spy, the bravest of them all, and though perhaps, by the rules of war, his life is the only expiation of his offense, he, least of all spies, deserves such a fate. This is the man who discards uniform and arms, and enters the enemy's lines under cover of darkness, or boldly in broad daylight, and stays there as long as it suits his purpose, gathering information which if he succeed in conveying to his general will mean victory. The annals of the American Civil War are replete with instances of such desperate bravery, and in that war many brave men who were captured as spies were shot after scant trial. In the South African campaign both sides had men who entered the enemy's lines at dead of night to gather information, and by consummate coolness and bravery managed to escape detection, or defy capture. One particular instance which I have in mind concerns the successful disguise of one of Remington's Guides as a Zulu *voorlooper*, or ox-leader, and his deception of the Boers for some weeks, until by accident his identity was betrayed, and only the magnanimity of a general who admired a brave man averted death for him.

Speaking generally, in modern warfare the spy is distinguished from a combatant, and his fate is judged accordingly, in this way: The combatant wears the uniform of his side on all occasions, and whether armed or unarmed, within the enemy's lines, or without, does not disguise his intentions. He may be a lone scout, miles from his command, it makes no difference. He has to fight for his life in every pinch, but once he has surrendered he is treated honorably as a prisoner of war. The spy disguises himself, and abandoning his uniform, and veiling his purpose, takes what is considered an unfair advantage of his enemy, at the same time forfeiting his right to be treated as a combatant. There is no question that his summary execution after capture is permitted by the customs of war, even if not always justified from a humane point of view, but as stated before circumstances may mitigate his offense, and rarely is a spy shot unless he is a traitor to his own side, or the consequences of his spying are too serious to be regarded leniently.

HERE, again, is the brief explanation of our identification-cards. They are offered free of charge to any of you. All we ask is that you comply carefully with the simple directions as they appear below in italics:

The cards bear this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Later, arrangements may perhaps be made for money deposits to cover cable or telegraph notifications. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. Send no applications without the two names and two addresses in full.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later, for the cost of manufacture, we may furnish, instead of the above cards, a card or tag of aluminum, proof against heat, water and general wear and tear, for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give the two names and addresses in full when applying.*

HOW about the proposed plan for a Legion of Camp-Fire members and adventurers in general? An organized fighting force, entirely free-footed in time of peace but ready to be mustered into service as one or more units in time of war. The plan was set forth at last month's Camp-Fire. All interested are asked to come forward with advice and plans.

THINK over our new department, our "Information Directory," and see whether you can add any other sources of information. Read carefully the note marked "Important."

Our thanks are due Algot Lange for his voluntary offer to be of service to those members of the Camp-Fire seeking information on the Amazon country. Mr. Lange has recently returned from his second long stay in that region.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

INFORMATION DIRECTORY

IMPORTANT: Only items like those below can be printed—standing sources of information. No room on this page to ask or answer specific questions. Recommend no source of information you are not *sure* of. False information may cause serious loss, even loss of life. *Adventure* does its best to make this directory reliable, but assumes no responsibility therefor.

For data on the Amazon country write Algot Lange, care Explorers' Club, 345 Amsterdam Ave., New York City. Replies only if stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed and only at Mr. Lange's discretion, this service being purely voluntary.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii and Alaska, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Ag., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

WANTED —MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the Camp-Fire, free of charge, to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

IF ANY real men hit this streak, write me! I want 50 to take part in the best thing ever. Adventure and profit sure things in expedition starting January, 1915, for Borneo way. Good shots and single men, no ties, cheap funerals being possible, and knowledge of mining.—Address HAROLD S. LOVETT, 28 Ermine Rd., Chester, England.

PARTNER to make a boat trip to the Barbados. Object, to explore a certain few of the smaller islands to the southward of Martinique and to have all the adventure there is in cruising around the Windward Islands. American, 28 years old, good navigator, at present mate of three-masted schooner.

Would like a man about 25 to 30 years old that would hold his own end up in any kind of an emergency.—Address L. R. LANE, 287 Hanover St., Boston, Mass.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

PARTNER, willing to go anywhere and used to roughing it. I prefer South America. Am 20 years old; 5 ft. 7½ in. in height; weigh 135 lbs. stripped; am a good shot; honorably discharged from the Texas National Guard account of leaving State; served about a year and a quarter. I want to get out of these good old Estados Unidos.—Address No. W 249.

WANT a partner. One who would like to live in the wilds of Arizona, hunting, trapping and prospecting for placer. I know where there's gold and silver in paying masses. Have my own outfit. Partner must have some resources, the more the better.—Address RAY E. GARDNER (Arizona Bill), care WALLACE WILLIARD, Cottonwood, Ariz.

WANT young man to join me, who is a willing worker, never in a hurry to go anywhere, and don't care where he is at any particular time. I own small good house-boat, and am at present on Lake Winnebago, Wis. I intend to go from here down Mississippi or around Great Lakes, and to take five or six years to do it in. Have a way to make a good honest living while doing it. Want partner to have sixty or seventy-five dollars to purchase engine for boat, which is 26 ft. by 8 ft. and seaworthy. Can not promise any big money, only a good living and an outdoor life.—Address No. W 250.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

WANT literary man, now writing for magazines, to collaborate in writing stories of adventure. Being something of a wanderer, I have good material for short stories of adventure, but can not put in salable form, not having the knack of writing. Want man to whom I can tell or write these stories and who can put them into shape and market them. He to take three-fifths and myself two-fifths of net returns. Have plenty of material.—Address No. W 248.

I AM nineteen years of age; am public-school graduate, two years' experience in an office and one year as shipping clerk.

Out of work for about three months and am failing in health. The city air is too close for me and I would gladly get out of it. I haven't any money and would like to have a partner to work our way till we get something satisfactory to do and then stick to it.—Address SAMUEL L. SIMON, General Delivery, New York.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relatives Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

PAUL C. HAMMOND, 5 ft. 11 in. high, of slender build and weighs about 140 lbs.; has chestnut hair which lays in a big fluff on his forehead; blue eyes and fair complexion; thumb on right hand rigid from blood-poisoning; perpendicular scar on right cheek (very faint), and horizontal scar on left cheek.

This boy always wears cap set back on head, and when he left home was attired in blue serge suit, tan shirt, tan cap and tan shoes. Last heard from Nov. 21, 1913, in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Was going from Cheyenne to Denver, and from Denver to Florence, Colo.—Address MRS. T. C. HAMMOND, Huron, Erie County, Ohio.

WILLIAM McARTHUR, my brother, was piper in 42nd Black Watch Highlanders. Last heard of working in Longlants Deep Mining Company, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1897. Had friend named Smith who kept a hotel in Port Elizabeth near Cape Town, S. A.—Address JOHN McARTHUR, 504 Chapala St., Santa Barbara, Cal.

BOB HICKMAN, bunkie of mine in Cuba during 1906-7-8-9, B Company, Hospital Corps. Had yellow jack and typhoid at Ciego De Avila from November, 1907, to April or May, 1908. Was game to the core and true-blue to his bunkie. Hear he was discharged at Plattsburg, N. Y., Summer of 1909.

Five feet seven or eight; brown eyes and hair; 160 lbs.; ruddy complexion; scar on left hand from knife-cut; was called "Doctor" by the men in the company; good man with a gun. Would like to hear from him to get information about the young fellow who died in hospital at Caibarien.—Address BOLTON ST. CLAIR, care General Delivery, Seattle, Wash.

HUBERT E. SIPES, last heard of in Rome, Italy, headed for Mexico. Think he is taking part in disturbance there. 6 ft. tall; weighs 140 lbs.; age 18 years; black hair; gray eyes. Likely to be found around seaports.—Address BLANT SIPES, R. F. D. No. 11, Buechel, Ky.

FRED SANDBERG, known on Great Lakes as "Hobart" in 1893-4-5. In Freetown, Sierra Leone, Africa, 1896. Left New York in bark *Agathe* 1898 with a Klondike party for Cook's Inlet; placer mining on Birch Creek, Alaska, 1898-99. Supposed to have shipped in San Francisco on American ship *Servia* for New York, Fall of 1900. Any news will be gladly received by his old chum "Scotty."—Address Dan McLeod, P. O., El Paso, Texas.

S. G. HOFFMAN, cook, any one knowing whereabouts. Last heard from in Holdenville, Okla.; and Claude Simmons, R. R. fireman and electrician, last heard of firing on M. O. & G. R. R. Southern Division.—Address F. M. Benson, U. S. S. *Buffalo*, care P. M., San Francisco, Cal.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

ALONZO BRADLEY, my father, disappeared from Wellsville, Mo., twenty-five years ago. 5 ft. 10 in. in height; dark hair; hazel eyes; scar on chin; light beard if any. Information concerning his whereabouts wanted by daughter.—Address Mrs. Mabel Fisher, Collierville, Tenn.

HENRY GUHL, discharged Co. C, 10th U. S. Inf., Nov. 22, 1902. Does any one know his present whereabouts.—Address M. A. Rose, St. James Hotel, Douglas, Ariz.

ALBERT POGODA, last seen in Zurich, Switzerland. Born in Berlin, Germany.—Address Emil Pfeiffer, 30th Co., C. A. C., Ft. Worden, Wash.

CARL COINER. Last heard from in Los Angeles and Pasadena. Father, President of Gas Company.—Address William Saunders, 5562 Clemens Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

J. C. PENNEY, my son, 19 years old. Want present address. Left Vallejo, Cal., on March 3, 1914. Does any one know his whereabouts?—Address M. E. Penney, 1150 S. Western Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

RALPH CARRICO please write to your old pal of five or six years ago.—Address W. M. Fox, Muskego, Wis., R. F. D. No. 10.

DONALD C. FAIRFAX, last heard of in Rio de Janeiro. Probably with prospecting or revolutionary party in South America.—Address No. L. T. 251.

BROTHER, last seen in 1909. Please write.—Address Stephen Epp, 101 Schermerhorn St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

$500.00 REWARD will be given for the discovery, living or dead, of Professor Cecil F. Lavell (formerly of Teachers College, Columbia University, New York) of Ohio State University of Columbus, Ohio, who while traveling lost his memory and identity at Hamilton, Canada, Monday, Nov. 24, 1913. Missing ever since.

Description: Age 41; height 5 ft. 10 in.; mole behind ear; teeth slightly gold-filled; dark hair, thin on top, slightly gray; prominent ears; prominent bumps over eyes, hollow temples, small brown mustache; prominent wrist-bones; slim build, weight 150 lbs.; dark blue eyes, may be wearing glasses; may not have been shaved since being lost; had quiet, pleasant gentlemanly manner, excellent habits and high character. When lost wore suit of gray diagonal cheviot, bought at Benjamin's, 5th Ave., New York, or David's, New York (name in coat pocket), also gray sweater coat; shoes, size 7 or 7½; collar 15½; size of hat 7⅛, also had Ryrie gun-metal watch.—Address Mrs. C. F. Lavell, 166 Walmer Road, Toronto, Canada.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

DENNIS CHARLES O'CALLAGHAN, native of Scarriff, County Clare, Ireland. Graduate Rockwell College, Cahir, County Tipperary. Last heard of in Goldfield, Nevada, 1907.—Address M. P. O'Callaghan, Athens, Ga.

W. D. (BILLY) ALT, formerly of Corpus Christi. Last heard from leaving Buenos Ayres for Chili.—Address Burr Sprague, 296 14th St., Milwaukee, Wis.

HOLBROOK, ELMER H. Late of Marine Corps, U. S. S. *Kansas*, 1908. By trade a printing pressman; last heard of in Seattle, Wash., in September of 1913. If any brothers of Camp-Fire know anything of his whereabouts would confer a great favor by notifying a fellow wanderer.—Address J. H. H., 2583a Mance St., Montreal, Canada.

ARTHUR W. DIES, my husband; age 51; 5 ft. 9 in.; light complexion; walks fast; slightly stooped; felon scar on finger. Last heard of in Des Moines, Ia., June, 1911.—Address A. W. Dies, Spring Valley, Minn.

JOHN MATTHEW DRENNAN. Last heard from in Mexia, Texas, firing on construction-train. Any information appreciated by sister.—Address Marcella Benware, 1115 Josephine St., Ft. Worth, Texas.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

SAMUEL LEVY, left Philadelphia years ago. Went to Wilkesbarre, Pa., then to coal regions, upper Pennsylvania. Engaged in service Spanish American War, Philippines and Cuba. Want word. Write nephew. Older brother's name, Harris.—Address Dr. J. Levy, 2818 Frankford Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.

CORDIA GALLUP, my brother. Known as Leon Burt. Last heard from Salem, Ore., 1912.—Address R. H. Gallup, 501 North 5th Avenue, Seattle, Wash.

DR. WALKER C. PENNOCK, graduate Philadelphia Dental College 1905. Chummed with me 1903 to 1905 at 239 N. 18th St. Would like to learn whereabouts or hear from him.—Address Dr. J. Levy, Dentist, 2818 Frankford Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.

J. J. TROUGHTON, moonlight and scenic artist; left San Diego, Cal., three years ago for Vancouver, B. C.—Address L. M. Sylvester, 936 Union St., San Diego, Cal.

ABBEY OLSEN and Fred Beaver. If you see this, let me know where letter will reach you.—Address Arcade Station, Nashville, Tenn. Your pal Sandy.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

ALLAN H. OWEN, last heard of Milwaukee, Wis. Wor wanted by partner.—Address Al Berger, Chickasaw Hotel, Hill Street, Los Angeles, Cal.

JOHN MEISEL, of Newark, N. J., disappeared in New York City about three years ago. 5 ft. 9 in., brown hair, dark complexion, 29 years old.—Address C. V. Russell, U. S. S. Utah, Box 2, care of P. M., N. Y. City.

BARRETTE, MISS CORA MABEL, last heard of in San Bernardino, Cal. Married to Mr. E. L. Krushine. Information wanted by brother.—Address Walter H. Barrette, Mare Island, Cal.

GEORGE H. STEPHENSON, lawyer, last heard of at Bay St., Toronto. Any one knowing whereabouts please communicate.—Address L. T. No. 247.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

ROSCOE THOMSON, of Miles City, my brother. 26; small build, brown hair and eyes. Last seen in Harlowton, Mont., October, 1912.—Address Mrs. Ida Born, 451 South 6th, East Salt Lake City, Utah.

RAYMOND C. BOSSARD, of Kansas City. Last heard of from Atlantic City in 1913. Write your pal of Wilmington boat.—Address L. Alan Wright, 4907 Walnut St., Philadelphia, Pa.

M. E. BRICE, president of oil-well companies, Beaumont, Texas, field in 1902.—Address L. T. No. 244.

ARTHUR CHARLTON (baseball-player) formerly with Maplewood A. C., Yonkers. With me from Hastings to Uniontown on schooner "Daisy."—Address Nathan Goldstein, P. O. Box 40, Yonkers, N. Y.

JAMES C. TAYLOR and wife, Margaret Dillon Taylor, who, with two children, George and May Bell, left Roxbury, Mass., for California about 1867, accompanied by mother, Jane Taylor of Waltham, Mass.—Address JOHN A. TAYLOR, Mt. Park Hotel, Hot Springs, N. C.

CHARLES B. RICE, my uncle from Elida, Ohio. Last heard of in K. Cy. It is believed he resides somewhere in Hannibal Co., Missouri. Any one knowing of his whereabouts kindly notify niece.—Address MABEL C. RICE, 53 W. 35th St., New York City.

CHARLES ROMPELL, last heard of him in Omaha City, Nebr., 1908. Cook for construction and railway companies. Like to know if living or dead.—Address O. BUSSE, 212 E. 65th St., New York City.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

CHRISTIAN M. BUTTERBAUGH (Chris), my uncle. 39 years of age; blue eyes; black hair; about 6 ft. tall; heavy set. Last heard of in Fairbury, Nebr.—Address MAUDE WESTLAKE, R No. 3, Box No. 6, Boisé, Idaho.

ED. "KID" DOBBERT, last seen in San Pedro and Los Angeles, Spring of 1907 or 1908, after fighting Danny Webster at Naud Junction Pavilion.—Address No. L. T. 252.

THE following have been inquired for in full in the October or November issues of *Adventure*. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine.

ALSTON, WILLIAM E.; Alt, W. D. (Billy); Ansell, Capt. R. H. M.; Arrington, Tommy; Atkin, Randolph; Barnes, William Henry; Bishop, Charles C.; Brown, James; Carr, David H.; Case, John; Clifford, Dennis; Comstock, Orns H.; Davenport, Phil; Davis, Warren; Ensign, W. H.; Hall, Charles T.; Jordan, Fred; Kemp, driver in Oakland; Kilburn, A. A.; McClintock, Harry K.; Meldrum, Archie Coatsworth; Neill, H. (Nielson); O'Callaghan, Dennis Charles; Owen, Robert; Paige, Frederick; Rogerson, William L.; Rompell, Charles; Russell, Charles B., Hospital Corps; Sarries, James H.; Scheidell, John; Shaw, William C.; Snowberger, Kirk R.; Thurber, E. T. (Tom); Treat, Roy M.; Walker, Edith Sarah Juliette.

MISCELLANEOUS. Any one who worked in J. F. Marshell's and John Bruggar's paper-box shops; Comrades, Co. G, 5th Inf. in Central and Western States; Rampby, Will F., F. Balance or Harry Balance; Members of K. Co of the 18th Inf. during 1900 to 1902; "Spade Tail" Joe Bennett, George Ligars, "Chicken" Gardner or any of the bunch of the 18th U. S. Inf. on Panay Island in '99-1900. Also Serg't. Behi, 18th Inf.; Will, mail at Sydney; Clare, William, Steurtzel, Count, Leach, "Doc."

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 107, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, W 218, C 189, C 198, C 205, L. T. 207. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure.*

MANUSCRIPTS sent us by the following are being held by us, having been returned to us as unclaimed at the addresses furnished:

W. Lynch, Trenton, N. J.; W. Mack, Pacheca, Mexico: Henry W. Edwards, New York; W. G. Gormley, Ontario, Canada; George Stillons, Chicago, Ill.; Francis Manston, Chicago, Cal.; Charles E. Mack, New York; William Barry Kane, Chocolate Bayou, Texas; James Perry, Brooklyn, N. Y.

RANDOLPH H. ATKIN, please send us your present address. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure.*

IMPORTANT NOTICE

AS ANNOUNCED in the July issue, every item will be published three times, then taken out. But in the *January* and *July* numbers of each year we will publish the names of all who have been inquired for and remain unfound.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

For the benefit of those of our readers who like to know in advance what stories are coming to them in the next ADVENTURE, we set aside this space. The following are at present booked for the January issue, out December 3rd:

THE ADVENTURERS

By Arthur A. Nelson

A four-part story of Africa, Cecil Rhodes, and the lost descendants of a Viking crew.

OIL AT SAN NICOLAS

By W. Townend

A complete novelette—his first. A strong tale of the West.

DISOWNED!

By Talbot Mundy

You know Talbot Mundy and you know **Dick Anthony of Arran.** This is by one about the other.

JERRY ROHAN'S GOAT

By Octavus Roy Cohen

Adventure has invented a new stunt for baseball stories. Watch for it in this story. Easily seen.

THE NEXT TO THE LAST SHOT

By Captain George Brydges Rodney

A Western story, with a queer kick in it at the end.

THE RETURN OF WOLF McINNIS

By Arthur H. Morse

A story of the Yukon that "takes hold."

COME-ON CHARLEY'S MERRY CHRISTMAS

By Thomas Addison

Come-On makes a bet at The Goats' Club. An exciting Christmas "was had by all."

"FOR TRICKS THAT ARE VAIN"

By Norman Springer

The author's story in this issue will tell you whether you'll like this next one.

SPANGLES AND SOAPSUDS

By C. Hilton-Turvey

One of the best *Miss Dem* stories we've had yet.

Probably also there'll be at least one of these two stories:

WHO WON?

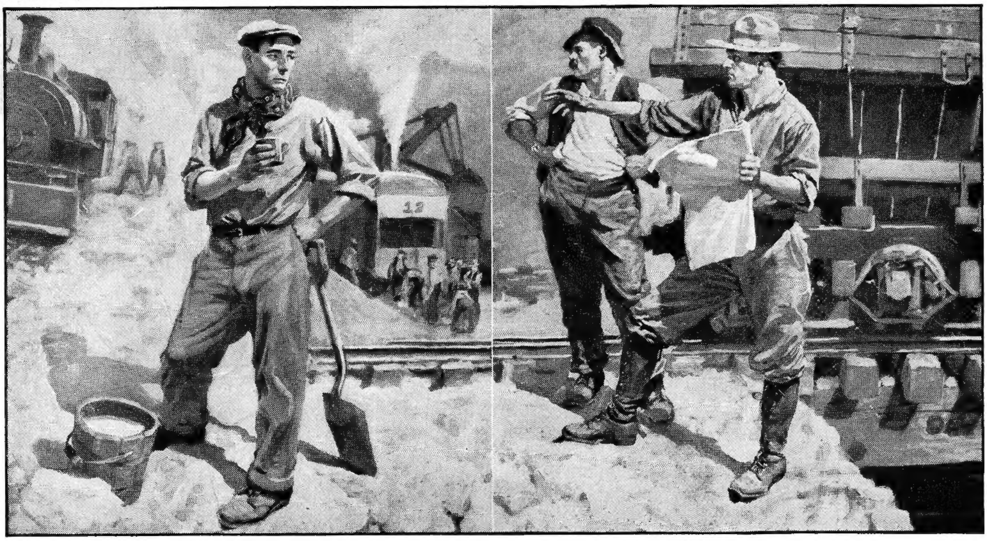
By William West

An automobile-race story by the author of "The Range Rider."

A QUESTION OF BRAINS

By E. A. Morphy

Brains, not intellect. A grimly humorous tale of war.



$2 a DAY—or $2 an HOUR?

Which will it be? The difference is only a matter of **training.** The man who works with his hands will always be an order-**taker.** He will take orders from the man who knows how to use his **brains.**

What's ahead of **you**? Are **you** going to be an order-**giver** or an order-**taker**? Are you going to be paid for what your brains **know** or for what your muscles can **do**?

The International Correspondence Schools can qualify you to be an order-**giver.** They can help you to a better job by giving you the **training** that the better job requires. They can help you to earn more money. They can help you to a more congenial position and send you to work in the morning chock full of ambition and determination.

For 24 years the I. C. S. have been aiding men just like you to rise to positions where salaries are larger and opportunities greater. Every month more than 400 men of all occupations voluntarily report better jobs and more money as a result of I. C. S. training.

Mark the Coupon

Successful men in every city and every town trace their success to the day they **marked the coupon.** Start **your** real success to-day. Mark the coupon.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 884 SCRANTON, PA.
Explain, without further obligation on my part, how I can qualify for the position before which I mark **X**

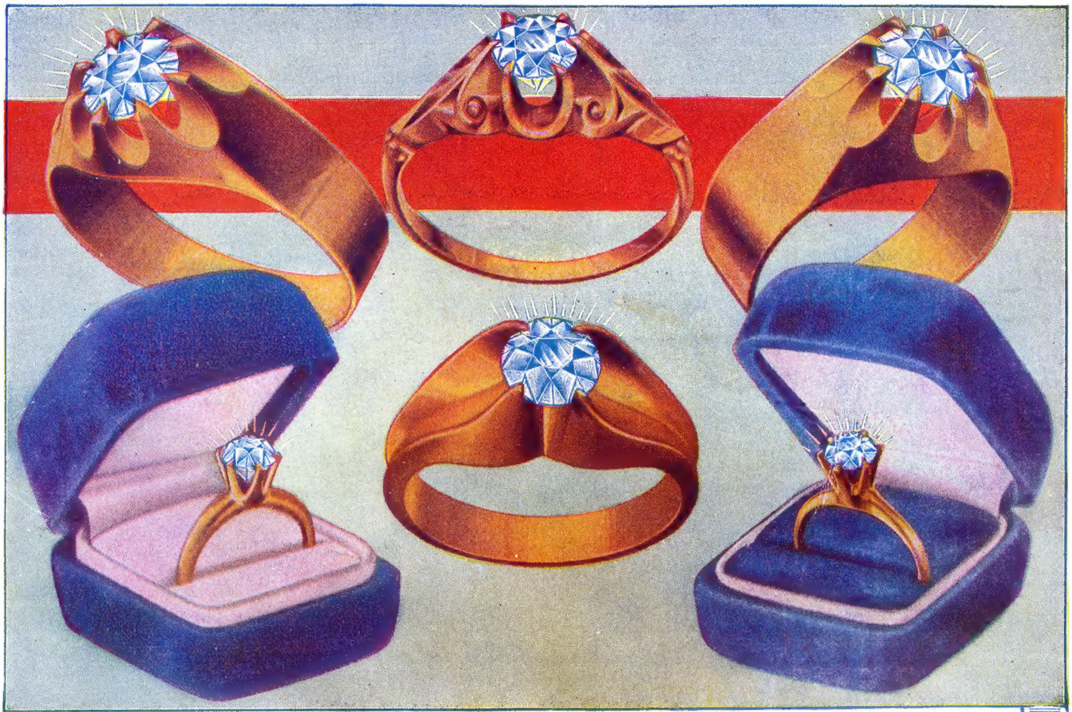
- Salesmanship
- Electrical Engineer
- Elec. Lighting Supt.
- Electric Car Running
- Electric Wireman
- Telephone Expert
- Architect
- Building Contractor
- Architectural Draftsman
- Structural Engineer
- Concrete Construction
- Mechan. Engineer
- Mechanical Draftsman
- Refrigeration Engineer
- Civil Engineer
- Surveyor
- Mine Superintendent
- Metal Mining
- Locomotive Fireman & Eng.
- Stationary Engineer
- Textile Manufacturing
- Gas Engines
- Civil Service
- Railway Mail Clerk
- Bookkeeping
- Stenography & Typewriting
- Window Trimming
- Show Card Writing
- Lettering & Sign Painting
- Advertising
- Commercial Illustrating
- Industrial Designing
- Commercial Law
- Automobile Running
- Teacher
- English Branches
- Good English for Every One
- Agriculture
- Poultry Farming
- Plumbing & Steam Fitting
- Sheet Metal Worker
- Navigation
- Languages
- Chemist
- Spanish
- French
- German

Name____________________

Present Occupation____________________

Street and No. ____________________

City________________ State________



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